



T. EARL CHRISTY

Belle of Lynn

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BELLE OF LYNN

BY

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THE BELLE OF LYNN.

CHAPTER I.

“ You are the ‘Belle of Lynn,’ ” he said to her, with a smile. “ I have heard of nothing else since I came here. All the masters of that dull old grammar-school, and half the pupils too — ”

“ They are very kind,” she replied, shyly, “ but I do not know any of them, and I did not know that they had given me that name.”

“ They speak of you always as the Belle of Lynn,” he replied. “ Are you content to be the belle of a village ? ”

“ Lynn is not a village,” she answered, gravely.

“ What is it, then ? ” he asked.

“ Lynn is a county town, quaint and old-fashioned—full of historical interest. It is of far more importance than any village could be.”

“ Then you are content to be the Belle of Lynn ? ” he repeated ; and with a smile bright as the sunshine around her the young girl answered :

“ Yes, I am quite content. I should be content to be any one or anything if only for the happiness of living in this beautiful world.”

He looked around him—on the green trees, the shining waters, and the blue sky, thinking to himself that the face before him was the most beautiful of all things upon which he gazed.

“ I never thought,” he said, “ when I took up my abode at the Clover Farm that I should have the privilege of being so near to you. What a fortunate thing it is for me ! You will say that I exaggerate, but it is true that the very sight of you brings to my mind all that is

most fair and bright in creation. I think of the light of the sun, the shining of the stars, the singing of the birds, and the bloom of all lovely flowers, when I look at your face."

She smiled, and her eyes drooped from his, but she answered :

" Mine must be an extraordinary kind of face to remind you of all those things."

Though she smiled, he could see that she was pleased, and that the eyes she hid from him were shining with delight.

" Why did you come to live at the farm ? " she asked, and he sighed before he answered her.

" It was so dark at the grammar-school," he answered ; " dark and gloomy ; the building is old-fashioned, and so completely surrounded by tall trees that in some of the rooms it is hardly possible to read, and I—I love sunshine, light, brightness and fresh air above all things. I tried my best, but I could not live there."

She looked up into his face with wonder.

" You are not English ? " she said.

" No," he replied, " I am not English. I belong to the fairest land on which the sun shines, the land of the lily and the violet—beautiful France."

" You do not look like a Frenchman," she said ; then drooped her lovely eyes again, lest he should read in them how well she had studied his face. " You are fair, and tall, and strong," she continued ; " you have gray eyes that grow black when you are much in earnest. You are more like the typical Saxon than the typical Frenchman."

" I care little what I look like, provided I please you," he said, quickly.

He did so ; but she would not tell him how much.

" I have heard your name, too," she said, " but it was from one of the farm-servants, who did not know how to pronounce it."

" My name is Leon de Soldana," he said, with a low bow, and a hot flush which covered his face.

" And you are—" then she stopped ; but he took the words from her.

"I am a French refugee. I belong to one of the oldest families in France. My ancestors were lords of a large and fair domain, while I am friendless, homeless, penniless, but for the money I earn by teaching my native language. It was musical enough once in my ears, before these lads of Lynn tortured and twisted it out of all sound and sense. I am that most despised of all men—a French refugee, a nobleman without a shilling, a man with an ancient title and no home!"

"What is your title?" she asked, softly.

"I am, or should be, if I had my rights, the Comte de Soldana," he answered.

"Is that known at the College?" she asked.

"Only to the principal," he answered. "I should have a fine life with those boys if they knew I was Comte de Soldana. It is hard enough now; it would be worse then. No one knows but the principal and you," he added, his voice softening. "I try to forget all about it, my beautiful France, and the honors that should be mine. I try to remember that I am Leon de Soldana, teacher of French at St. Edward's Grammar School, Lynn."

"I wish," she said gently, "I could do something for you."

"You can!" he cried, eagerly. "You can brighten my whole life, you can give me the great pleasure of seeing you sometimes, and of speaking to you; we shall be near neighbors. I shall forget all trouble if I may look at and speak to you—why, I have been so lonely and so friendless that it is like a vision of Paradise to me. Tell me your name? You must have another besides the Belle of Lynn."

"My name is Lima Derwent," she answered.

"Lima!" he cried. "Why, that is a Spanish word."

"No. You would never guess why that name was given to me. Have you ever met one of those calm, gentle women who, without being what the world calls clever and intellectual, have ideas and thoughts that are all poetry? My mother is one of them. She has no idea of it herself; she has read no poetry; she has not even been educated; yet she speaks always as though she

knew what the birds sing to one another, and what messages the wind brings from over the sea. She knows the secrets of all the flowers and trees that grow around us ; she knows what blossoms the bees love best ; she knows where the birds love to build ; and what do you think my mother loves best ? ”

“ I cannot tell,” he said, with an admiring glance at the radiant face.

“ The lime-trees,” she cried, “ those beautiful, shimmering, golden, green limes you see ; they grow all round the banks of the Allan Water. My mother loves them. My father says she makes a kind of religion out of them ; she knows every branch ; she knows where every bird’s nest is built ; she knows all the secrets that the wind whispers to them. When she came here, a young bride, fair and gentle, to Allan Water, she spent half her time under the boughs of the lime-trees, and she named me after them. I am really Lima of the lime-trees. Do you know what else my mother says ? ”

“ No,” he replied.

“ She says that ever since I have been born there has been a cadence of melancholy in the music that the wind makes through the boughs. She says that it is a sign of some unhappiness in the future for me, but I do not believe that — do you ? ” she asked, raising her radiant face to his.

“ I — believe in unhappiness for you ! ” he cried. “ I should say it was almost impossible. If your fortunes are but fair as your face, Miss Derwent, they will be bright enough.”

“ My father always reproves her,” said the girl, gravely, “ but for all that, when we walk together by the limes, my mother and I, when the leaves rustle and the boughs sway, her face grows troubled, and she says : ‘ Be careful, Lima ; ah, be very careful, Lima ; the voice of the wind bodes sorrow for you.’ ”

“ Are you frightened ? ” he asked.

“ No, not at all. In all this bright, wide world, I see no shadow of coming sorrow for me,” she answered.

“ I hope your life may be as smooth and bright as your beautiful Allan Water,” said Leon.

As he spoke he looked around him. He was no poet, nor had he much of the artist's soul, but he marvelled at the beauty of the scene.

This beautiful Allan Water is known all over England as one of the loveliest spots in it. Poets have sung of it, and the artists have sketched it in all seasons and in all lights—a broad, beautiful stream, wide, deep, and long; on one side of it rose the old town and green woods of Lynn, on the other stood the picturesque old mill known as the Allan Water Mill. The great wheel was turned by part of the stream where the water ran through a deep valley, and then came foaming, rushing back into the stream. When the great wheel of the mill was at work, one could hear the foaming and dashing of the waters at a great distance.

All along the banks of Allan Water grew magnificent lime-trees; graceful willows dipped their branches into the stream; in some distant part, where the water was shaded by trees, and the little pleasure-boats did not venture, the water-lilies grew in great white clusters; graceful sedges and green reeds, with blue forget-me-nots, grew in the low grass that the water was always kissing in slow, solemn fashion.

People came from far and near to sketch the picturesque old mill and to row their boats on Allan Water—a broad, beautiful stretch of water; white swans sailed on its breast, and wild fowl made it their home; the water-martins haunted it; it was said even that the coot and the heron had been seen there. At one part, near Lynn Wood, it grew narrower, and the dwellers in Lynn had thrown a bridge across it—by no means the work of an architect, who would have shuddered, while an artist rejoiced in it—a quaint, irregular bridge, which was the charm of the whole landscape. Old-fashioned stepping-stones led to it, and the bridge itself seemed to have been seized upon by the very goddess of flowers; thick, green ivy clustered over the old wood-work, and every wild flower, every creeper that could find a place grew there.

A great artist painted the bridge of Allan Water, the quaint wooden pile with its wealth of twining foliage; the grand stretch of water throbbing under the crimson rays

of the setting sun ; the great green limes, the dark masses of Lynn Woods ; the mill, with the great wheel ; and all England grew crazy with delight over the picture.

It was morning now, a morning in May, when the miller's lovely daughter, crossing the bridge, met the young stranger whom she had seen many times, but to whom she had not spoken. There was a plank that had become loosened, and a large bunch of crackling thorns had been placed over it in primitive style, and these same thorns had caught in Lima Derwent's dress ; she could not extricate herself, but the young stranger came to her rescue and released her. She thanked him, and then the little conversation, which was to have great results, took place.

A morning in May, with the sun shining, and the beautiful wide water laughing in its rays. The birds were singing, the golden green leaves of the limes rippled in the sweet, soft air, the blue forget-me-nots looked up from the green grass with wondering eyes ; the sky was blue, and the waters had caught a golden tinge ; what wonder if they found the world so fair, and Allan Water the fairest spot in it ?

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGELY assorted pair, the two who stood on Allan Water Bridge, and after a time, a lingering touch of the hand, and lingering glances of the eye, showed that parting on that May morning was not pleasant. A strangely assorted pair ; for she, despite her dainty loveliness, her grace, the musical ring and intonation of her voice, the proud poise of her head, was only a miller's daughter ; and he, homeless, friendless, almost penniless, was the descendant of one of the oldest families of France.

Strangely assorted, yet they seemed to have a lingering attraction for each other ; for while Leon de Soldana crossed the bridge and went through the narrow lane—which was a bower of woodbines and led to Clover Farm—his heart was full of her, and he turned many times to watch the slender figure in the blue dress as it disappeared

between the trees. As she walked home by the tangling outstretched water, her whole thoughts were of him.

A miller's daughter! Yet, any one meeting her that morning with the light of the dawn of love shining in her eyes, and her fair face flushed with the fresh air, her hands filled with fresh dewy sprays of lilac just gathered, might have believed her to be a young princess.

The miller at Allan Water Bridge held an exceptional position, and he had given to his daughter an education quite unusual for one of her class. The mill had descended from father to son for many generations. The Derwents of the mill were as proud in the way of their descent as were the Howards or the Talbots. To the mill of Allan belonged all the fertile meadow land, the corn fields, the huge stacks of hay, the cattle feeding in the meadows, the sheep and lambs roaming amidst sweet grasses and heather; the white swans that sailed so gracefully over the broad deep bosom of Allan Water; the flights of blue pigeons that hovered over the old red roof, the spacious garden with its treasures of old-fashioned flowers; the orchards where the apple-blossoms were all in bloom; for the mill of Allan was a prosperous place, and the millers of Allan were reputed rich.

The present owner, John Derwent, had succeeded to the mills and meadows and the wealth of the Derwents when he was quite young, and he had married quite young the prettiest and sweetest lassie, he was accustomed to say, in the three kingdoms. He loved her all the better, perhaps, because he did not quite understand her. She was gentle, kindly of heart, industrious, fair and comely of face, but there were depths in her character that the miller would never fathom if he lived with her forever.

An unconscious poetical train of thought and ideas. She could hear voices and music where others heard none; things seemed plain to her that others did not think of or understand. She loved the beauties of nature and listened to the wonders of her voice. There were times when the miller looked in wonder at his wife; there can be no mistake about this one fact, that whether it be given in abundance or not, this gift of poetry raises

its possessor above all others. The miller did not always understand his wife, but he revered and respected her. They had been married many years before the little daughter was born, who was afterward to be the sunshine of the house. From the first they marvelled at her, she was so fair, so exquisite, so dainty; they worshipped her with passionate love; the whole world to them was centered in that one fair little child. There was something almost fierce and vehement about the miller's love for his little daughter. If her finger ached, if her lovely face grew pale, if her blue eyes grew dim, he was beside himself with fear. He had smiled at the mother's fanciful name chosen for her. Yet he was not ill-pleased, for he loved the green limes even as he loved Allan Water. After the birth of the little Lima he became a changed man; before that time he had been recklessly generous, now he had but one idea, and that was to save—save all for her.

When she was a tiny child of three, playing under the shadow of the green leaves, the sunlight making gold of her hair, he would watch her in solemn silence, then call his wife to his side, and say:

“That little lassie is a lady. She is only a miller's daughter, but nature has made her a lady, and we must help nature. She shall be a lady. She shall learn all that ladies learn; she shall have the gold that ladies like to spend; we must not thwart nature, for nature has made her a lady. Look at the graceful figure, light and well-poised as a bird on its wing; look at the little white hands, at the light-blue eyes; we must not thwart nature. That lassie will never make hay in the meadows, or climb the apple-trees, or milk the cows. She will be dainty, delicate, and beautiful.”

As the child grew, the passionate love of father and mother grew with her; for her they worked, for her they toiled and saved. They deprived themselves of many well-earned comforts, of all the luxury and indulgence, that the golden store might be increased which was to make Lima a lady. Her father's love for the golden-haired girl was so great he would have given his life for

her; he gave everything else—his time, his labor, his thoughts, his cares, his heart, and his love.

She must be a lady—nothing mean or sordid must come near her, nothing rough or rude must come in contact with her. No hot-house flower was ever more tenderly cherished, more daintily reared than the miller's daughter.

She must be a lady, and there was no one to teach her at Allan Mill, so it was decided that she should go to school. The best and most fashionable school in that part of the county was kept by Mrs. Sutherland at Craig House, Lynn. "A school"—to quote from the circular—"for the education of the daughters of the nobility and gentry." Nothing to do with trade. When the miller first applied to Mrs. Sutherland she said most decidedly that she could not take his daughter. "It would not do. It would lower the standard of the school."

He did the wisest thing possible; he brought Lima into the presence of the school-mistress, and she, looking at her with wondering eyes, said, "She is a little lady." The result was that Lima Derwent was admitted into that most select assembly, and there she remained until she was sixteen.

She came home to the mill of Allan, beautiful, accomplished, and "a lady." She was not in the least degree spoiled by this education so far above her class. She did not look down with contempt on the miller and his homely ways, or on her mother, whose English was not always perfect, although her ideas were full of poetry. She did not look down on her old home or her surroundings: she loved them all as though she had never left them. Her character was beautiful in its simplicity and tenderness. Although she had received the education of a lady, she knew that she was nothing more than a miller's daughter. She brought back to her beautiful old home accomplishments, education, graceful manners, but not one particle of affectation or vanity. The miller was delighted. Some little improvements were made in honor of her return. The miller built a new room—large and lofty—overlooking the broad, beautiful sheet of Allan Water; he fur-

nished it with unusual luxury ; there was a piano, a few fine engravings and water-colors, an easel, a book-case, and pretty, fanciful chairs. This was Lima's room, and to the miller, when she was in it, it seemed like an earthly Paradise.

So for a year she lived in the midst of the sunshine, the flowers and trees, the great, shining waters, her books and her music. She was perhaps lonely, although she never complained.

Her education had entirely unfitted her for any intimacy or companionship with those of her own class : there was nothing in common between this girl—refined, sensitive, delicate, with her spiritual, poetical mind, and highly organized nature—and the Misses Johnson, daughters of a neighboring farmer, hearty, healthy, buxom girls, who quarrelled about sweethearts and bonnets, or between the Misses Rudcorn, who were never so happy as when they were riding across the country, at imminent danger to their necks. And the class in which she had been educated did not recognize her ; she was never invited to visit Lynn Rectory, or the Hall, or Allan House, so that she was very lonely, and there were times when she longed for young people, longed to talk and to laugh in her own fashion : but she never expressed the wish, and never complained. She was the sunshine of the house ; her beautiful face, the sheen of her golden hair, her bright smile, the music of her voice, seemed to fill the old walls with warmth and sunshine. The miller had worshipped her as a child, he loved her now with even a greater and more passionate affection ; she was the very light of his eye, the joy of his heart and the pride of his life. He would look at her and watch her until the tears dimmed his eyes.

Then came the second part of the drama ; the first had been that nature must not be thwarted — she must be a lady ; the second was that, being a lady, she must of necessity marry a gentleman. There was no help for it.

The florid, good-natured farmers of the neighborhood would not do for this dainty, beautiful girl, and the miller was often perplexed as to how he should find a husband for her. His wife laughed at the notion.

"There is plenty of time yet," she would answer; "Lima is not quite seventeen; you need not think of a husband for her for some years yet."

"No, perhaps not; but my lady lass must marry a gentleman when the time to marry comes," said the miller.

"John," said his wife, "You seem to forget one thing—marriages are made in heaven. It is not for us to find a husband for Lima. She will do that, guided by her own love and instinct."

"I am not so sure whether love and instinct are safe guides," said the miller; and in the after-time he often thought of his own words, and said to himself that prudence should lead love and instinct. But, alas! it never did yet, and it never will!

Calm, bright, and clear as the shining water around her, was the life of Lima Derwent, until she reached her seventeenth year, then the calm was broken—never to return.

CHAPTER III.

THE famous grammar-school of St. Edward's made the town of Lynn famous. It had been founded many hundred years ago by one of the kings of that name, who endowed it with immense wealth. Through all the storms and tempests that troubled the state this school steered safely; years added but to its wealth and reputation.

It was thought something of an innovation at first when foreign masters were asked to reside there. The "French of Stratford-le-Bow" had been sufficient, but the managers were growing more particular as the school grew in repute. They had a French master to teach French and a German master for German. It was to take the situation of French teacher in St. Edward's Grammar-school that Leon de Soldana came to Lynn.

The old master, who had been taken ill suddenly, died in the midst of a busy term, and there was no resource but for the managers to advertise. They did so, and the

young Comte de Soldana, who was passing through London, happened quite by accident to see that advertisement. He did not wait, but went at once to the college. He laid his whole story before the principal; he had none or few friends in England; he was homeless, almost penniless, and he was the last of the once grand and prosperous race of the Soldanas. The principal listened, and was touched.

“ Still,” he said, looking at the handsome, eager face of the young man, “ it is not a question of family, or even of ancient descent, but whether you can teach French well.”

“ Try me,” cried the young man, eagerly, and the principal agreed to do so.

“ We had better not say anything about race or title,” he said to the young comte. “ My boys are sturdy Britons; they look upon all Frenchmen as their natural enemies. What they would say to a French nobleman, without one shilling to keep up his title, I cannot say. I strongly advise you not to try.”

So never a word was said, and the Comte de Soldana was only known as a very young teacher, but of brilliant and varied attainments. That his physique resembled that of a sturdy Saxon rather than the Norman was greatly in his favor. His strong, well-built figure, his broad shoulders and magnificent chest, his handsome face and fair hair were all unlike their notions of a Frenchman—they did not even caricature him.

Still, take the life at its best, despite the hearty liking of the boys and of the masters, it was but a dull existence for one who had the blood of a grand old race flushing and thrilling through his veins—for one who had every aristocratic instinct. The dark, gloomy rooms were hateful to him; if he could but see the sunshine! But the tall trees that seemed to shut the college in kept out the bright sunlight.

He asked if he could take lodgings near, and attend the college during lesson-hours, and, as a great privilege, permission was granted him.

Was it fate, fortune, or Providence that led him to seek a home in the beautiful place called Clover Farm,

standing at very little distance from the Mill of Allan ? He had heard, as every one did, of the Belle of Lynn, the miller's lovely daughter, who was so fair to see, and as modest as she was fair. Every one spoke of her beautiful face, but it was with respect and reverence ; all the young men sighed for her, but no one could boast of a word or smile, and they admired her all the more for it —all the more because she was just a little proud, this Belle of Lynn. She sought no admiration, she never laid herself out to draw attention. Leon de Soldana heard her name very often, but he had not thought much of her—every town had its reigning belle ; besides, what was the beauty or love of women to do with him, the last of a ruined race ?

But leaving Clover Farm one day, he saw her, and after that he was indifferent to her—never more.

He stood watching her as she walked along the path that led to the mill-stream, drinking in deep draughts of delight ; never in his life had he seen anything like her face and figure. She was unconscious of his watching, and passed out of sight, but his heart was on fire. The old race of Soldanas had been remarkable for their great personal beauty and for their ardent love. It was in him, this penniless French teacher, to love as the other nobles of his race had done, with fervor, eloquence and passion.

He said to himself that he would wait his time ; he would not startle her by speaking suddenly to her. This beautiful Belle of Lynn was a lady, they all agreed, but he would wait his opportunity, and he found it that morning when he met her on the bridge that spanned the narrowest part of Allan Water.

He went home with a glow in his heart such as had never warmed it before. His life had been lonely enough, and without comfort. For what political wrong-doing his grandfather had been banished from France matters little to this story. He was deprived of all his possessions—the grand old château of Soldana with its large domain, his property in Normandy called Belle d'Or, and his magnificent home in Paris, L'Hotel d'Or ; he was deprived of his revenue ; everything belonging to him was confiscated, and he was sent out to exile. He was but a

young man then. He brought his wife and son to England. How he lived was only known to Heaven and himself. At times he received help from old friends, but many of his friends were in exile like himself. He spent his whole time petitioning for his restoration ; the petitions were never even read ; therefore, he spent his life in vain.

He died, and his son succeeded to the same poverty, the same round of petitions, then married a girl as nobly born and poor as himself, the daughter of an illustrious exile, who, in his turn, had no hope of ever seeing "Fair France" again. He lived but five years — poverty and exile killed him who should have been Comte de Soldana, and lord of the great domain in Normandy — he died, leaving his wife and one child, Leon.

For some years after his death Mme. de Soldana had struggled on ; she taught French and music, and so earned enough to keep her little son and herself, but after a time her health and courage failed. Then an old friend, also an exile, came to the rescue ; he offered to educate Leon, and he offered to help Mme. de Soldana to return in disguise to France, where she lived on a miserable pittance for some years. During that time mother and son never met, although they corresponded continually, and the greatest affection existed between them. Mme. de Soldana, even in her poverty, was as proud as an empress ; she never abandoned her dignity even when, as it happened at times, she had not bread to eat.

She had good reason to love her son : small as was the sum he received for his teaching, he sent the greater part of it to his mother. He was lonely and desolate enough, this handsome young prince of a banished race, and the first light that brightened his life was the kindly smiles of the Belle of Lynn. He thought more as he walked home than he had ever done before ; young as he was, his life had been such a struggle with poverty, he had not felt the bitterness of exile so keenly until now. He stopped at the little white gate which led into the rich clover meadows. If he were but lord of Soldana, with the magnificent ancestral home of his of which he had heard so much, but which he could not hope to see, he might

perhaps win the love of some girl as fair as this. Lord of Soldana ! His soul seemed to wake up within him when he uttered the words aloud, just as his ancestors had answered to the battle call. Lord of Soldana, with men to command and money to spend, a large domain to rule over ; and then he burst into cruel, pitiful laughter. Lord of Soldana ! when only a few shillings stood between him and absolute poverty.

“ Long live the white lilies of France ! ” he said to himself. “ My grandfather must have done some good to his country or he would never have been banished from it ” —as a rule the man who is an enemy to his own nation is fêted and made much of — “ Long live the white lilies of France.”

Then, from the far distance, came the sound of the bells of Lynn, and he knew that he must go to work again. The lordship of Soldana, the white lilies of France, the beautiful face of the girl he had just left, must all pass away now like a dream : he must face row after row of sturdy British boys, each one of whom seemed to have a more horrible pronunciation than the others. Sturdy British boys who looked down with infinite contempt on all attempts to teach them French, asking each other, with true British indignation, of what use it was ; while the Comte de Soldana forgot his dreams in the very practical work before him.

Allan Water shone bright and clear in the morning sunlight, and Lima Derwent stood at the window watching the sunlight that lay upon it.

It had been the miller’s fancy that this window of the new room which he had built exclusively for his daughter’s use should look right over the broad, shining water and the stream itself washed up against the newly built wall. Any one rowing in a boat past that window could almost have touched it, and could easily converse with any one standing there, as Lima was doing now.

She was thinking of the first time she had heard the young French refugee spoken about, an evening some five weeks ago, when one of her father’s friends had called at the Mill of Allan, and, speaking of the grammar-

school, said they had a new French master there, and what a fine handsome young man he was.

The miller growled out that he hated Frenchmen, and that if they were as handsome as Cupid it would make no difference to him.

The second time was when Mrs. Grey, of the Clover Farm, came over to consult her mother as to the prudence of taking him in as a lodger.

"I tell you quite frankly, Mrs. Derwent," said the mistress of Clover Farm, "that if I had young daughters about the house I would not do it, for a handsomer, more kindly young gentleman never lived. He is like a young prince in his manner—not that I have seen a prince, but he is what I should think they are."

And Lima had pondered deeply over her words; she was thinking of them now as she watched the sunlight deepening on the calm breast of Allan Water.

CHAPTER IV.

THERE came a moonlight night in May, when the lilacs were so fully in bloom that their pale, soft petals fell on the grass, and the white syringa flowers drooped with the weight of their own perfume—a night so still, so sweet, that it might have been borrowed from Heaven.

Allan Water had not a ripple on its deep bosom—the white lily buds were sleeping, the swans had gone to rest, the forget-me-nots had shut their blue eyes, the wind stirred the green leaves so faintly it seemed to sigh over them, and Leon de Soldana stood on the rustic bridge watching the lights that shone from the Mill of Allan. It was more than ten days since he had met Lima, and he had seen her every day since. Once he had overtaken her in the green, shady lane that led to the farm, and two whole hours had passed before they even realized that they had met and it was time to part. There came a morning when he could not sleep for thinking of her; her eyes, her face, her voice haunted him, and he rose quite early while the dew lay on the ground, and went

out into the clover meadows. The loveliness of the bright, fair morning led him on until he came to the fields near the Allan Water ; and there, shining between the great lime-trees, he saw the folds of a blue dress ; he saw Lima standing gathering the thick dew-drops from the blades of grass. Will he ever forget the beauty of that blushing face, as she told him with smiles and utter confusion why she was in the fields so early ?

She had read in some old-fashioned book that if any maiden washed her face for nine mornings together in May-dew it was a charm that would give her a complexion like lilies and roses forevermore. He laughed, too, as he heard it, thinking to himself surely never was a picture so fair as that of this tall, slender English girl, whose feet scarce brushed the daisies as she stepped lightly over the grass, her beautiful face blooming with health and radiant with happiness. How lovely she looked with the dew on her face, hanging on the long dark lashes, fringing the golden hair.

“ I wish every lady in the land used your *cosmetique*,” he said ; and she answered carelessly that it was in the power of all. Even afterward that picture returned to him — a girl standing in the long green grass, her hands filled with morning dew, and her face blooming with the richest hues of health.

They had lingered until the sun rose high in the heavens, and then the sole remaining descendant of the Soldanas suddenly remembered that the sturdy British boys would be waiting for him.

They met again when Leon was crossing the Lynn Woods, and Lima sat sketching a giant oak. That day the girl went home with such a heaven of delight in her face, such a light in her eyes, that her mother looked at her in wonder. What was coming over the child that her face should be so dazzling and bright ? Then came the moonlight when Leon, haunted still by dreams and memories of her, unable to sleep or to rest, came out to look at the house where she lived — the casket which held his jewel. He could see so plainly the lights in her window, which reflected straight and clear in the deep waters. Then an unutterable longing seized him to be

nearer her. A boat was lightly fastened to the branches of an alder-tree. He unknotted the cords, and the next minute was rowing quickly toward her window. He knew how to use the oars, this man, whose ancestors had fought in the Crusades.

He was soon underneath her window. It was a picture in itself to see the boat in the moonlight skimming the deep, bright waters, just as it was a poem in itself listening to the sweeping strokes of the oars.

There, under her window, he rests at last, and listens, for she is singing, and he thinks to himself never was music so sweet. The window is closed and the lace blinds drawn; the boat rests motionless just where the shadow of the great trees fall; but he can hear plainly—the sound floats down to him through the clear air and the white moonlight. He can even hear the words, each one clear and distinct. It is the old-fashioned ballad that will be sweet until the world ends—

“On the banks of Allan Water,
Where the sweet spring tide did fall,
Was the miller’s lovely daughter,
Fairest of them all.

“For a bride a soldier sought her,
And a winning tongue had he;
On the banks of Allan Water,
None so gay as she.

“On the banks of Allan Water,
When brown autumn spreads its store,
There I saw the miller’s daughter,
But—she smiled no more.

“For the summer grief had brought her,
And the soldier false was he;
On the banks of Allan Water,
None was sad as she.

“On the banks of Allan Water,
When the winter snow fell fast,
Still was seen the miller’s daughter;
Chilling blew the blast.

“But the miller’s lovely daughter,
Both from cold and care was free;
On the banks of Allan Water
There a corpse lay she.”

The soft, sad refrain floated down to him, and seemed to mingle with the sigh of the wind and the wash of the

waters, until it formed a dirge—a sweet, sad dirge; he wondered just a little who this miller's lovely daughter was; he resolved that when he saw her next he would ask her all about the ballad. Then, again, falling as it were from the window, in a soft, sweet shower of notes came the words:

“On the banks of Allan Water
There a corpse lay she.”

He wished that the wind did not sigh through the trees, and the water would not seem to sob as it washed round the little boat. He wished she had not sung so sad a song, but had sung of love, of hope, of happiness.

He must tell her when he saw her next; those beautiful young lips of hers must not sing of sorrow or of death. Surely the sweet-scented wind must blow chill from the great mere; he found himself trembling without at all knowing why.

Then the song changed, the sigh of the wind and the sobbing of the water grew fainter, the moonlight grew brighter, all the heart and soul there was in him awoke to its full extent as he listened. He forgot his poverty and his exile, he forgot the bright beauty of his native land, he forgot the grand old castle and the waving woods, the banners of his ancestors, and the white lilies of fair France; even the present sordid miseries of his life—the rows of sturdy British boys—were all forgotten as he listened to the bright song which told of hope and love that should never, never die.

The words floated away over Allan Water, and there was silence; the light died from that window, and came from an upper casement; he heard her open it and knew that she was looking at the moonlight beauty of Allan Water. He remained quite silent; no stir of the water, of the oars, or of the boat told of his presence; he would not have her know that he was watching and waiting under her window; she might not be pleased, and a frown on her fair face would darken even the sunshine for him.

When the window was fastened and the light gone, he

rowed back again over Allan Water, and went home to dream of her.

It was evening when he saw her next; he had been waiting some hours then to see her, and just at sunset he caught sight of the blue gown down by the banks of the great wide mere.

"I heard you singing last night," he said. "I listened to you, and I want you to tell me is it of this Allan Water that you sung?"

"No," she answered. "The ballad called 'On the Banks of Allan Water' is one of the oldest we have. This beautiful stream here is named after the Allans of Allan, who lived here many hundred years ago. I have always loved it, because, you see," she added, with a deep blush, "it is all about a miller's lovely daughter."

"But it is such a mournful song," he cried. "I cannot bear to hear you sing it."

She looked at him with wistful eyes.

"It is like life," she answered; "first she was gay and fair, then she loved, then she died."

"Surely you do not think that love ends in death?" he cried.

"Death is the end of all things," she said. "'From cold and care was free.' Is not that the end of all lives?"

He spoke so vehemently that she could hardly understand him:

"No—a thousand times no! Who could have believed that you, so young, so bright, so fair, could have such gloomy thoughts? It is wonderful to me how sadness lies underneath the character of all English people."

"I am not sad," she answered, raising her beautiful eyes to his, "but I cannot help seeing, truths. I am not given to sadness. I may say of myself—

"On the banks of Allan Water
None so gay as she."

"I shall love that ballad, and yet I shall hate it," cried Leon. "Sing it to me again."

Once more she sung it, and the clear, sad notes floated over the water,

"It gives me a strange, uncanny feeling," he said ; "but Lima—let me call you Lima—you need not sing sad ballads ; you will have a bright fate, bright love, bright fortune, bright life awaits you ; sing no more of sorrow or death ; no false lover will win your heart only to throw it away."

He had grown to love her so deeply, so dearly, so well, that he could not bear to think of a shadow falling over her life.

Love of her had taken possession of him ; love of her brightened the whole world for him ; love of her had changed the land of exile into earthly paradise ; love of her made him believe that it was better to have poverty, hard work, exile and obscurity with her than honor, glory, title and fortune without her.

He said to himself that if the grand old castle and the ancient domain, the large revenue and the family honors were his, he would lay them all at her feet—he would crown her with the white lilies of France. But he was poor, and an exile ! Would it be fair to ask this fresh, beautiful young girl to share his lot?—and if he asked her would she say "yes?" Should he woo her and win her, this fair-haired girl who had brightened the world for him ?

He did not hear the answer that wailed through the trees, any more than he saw the tragical future that lay before him.

CHAPTER V.

THERE is nothing in life so sweet as love's young dream ; the wealth and the honors that come afterward, the fullness of gratified ambition, the knowledge of the world's respect, are all nothing compared to the beauty and sweetness of love's young dream—when the sun shines and the skies are blue for us ; when the birds sing and the flowers bloom for us ; when "love is heaven, and heaven is love." It comes but once in life ; other loves may succeed it, only one has the sweetness, the passion, the beauty, and the poetry of love's young dream.

It was July now ; the languor of summer heat had settled over the land ; even the red roses yielded to the warmth, and the water-lilies on the great wide mere seemed to be sleeping in the sun. Not many weeks since the last of the Soldanas had met the miller's daughter, and already he had forgotten everything else in the wide world. There were times even when he forgot the sturdy British boys and their lessons, until a sharp note or message from the principal brought him back to his senses. He seemed only to live in the time he spent with her ; she was the whole world to him. To meet her in the early morning, to see her at noon, to find her down by the water-side on the lovely summer evenings, had become the end and aim of his life. To watch the loveliness of her face, to catch the varying tones of her voice, to tell her over and over again how dearly he loved her, to kiss the white hands that he clasped in his own, were the delights of his life. He did not know that any one had ever loved in the same fashion before ; he thought it was to them alone this new revelation of life had come. He laughed when he remembered that he had once found exile and poverty hard to bear ; exile had brought him to her presence ; poverty had led him to find her ; welcome both with her. He had intended to keep his secret for a time, she was so young, but there came a day when it escaped him.

A beautiful day in June, when the great sheaves of white lilies that grew in the gardens of Allan Mill were all in bloom, and Lima, passing them by, gathered two or three lovingly, and with them she placed some rich red roses. A beautiful silent June afternoon, and she was going down to the water's edge. As a matter of course she met Leon. How he contrived to give to all these meetings the appearance of being accidental it was impossible to say, but he did so. Equally, as a matter of course, he sat down by her side, and his attention was caught by the sunlight on the white shining petals of the lily.

“ How many countries have floral emblems ! ” he said. “ The lilies of France, the roses of England, the sham-

rock of Ireland, the thistle of Scotland. There are none that I love like the regal white lilies."

He took one from her hand as he spoke.

"The lilies of France and the roses of England—which will you have, Lima?"

"Both," she replied.

"Both!" he repeated, slowly, placing two of the beautiful flowers close together. "Do you know what that implies?"

"No," she answered, with a hot flush, "I do not."

The golden haze of the afternoon dropped over them; the faint washing of the waters as it rippled through the green grass; the faint song of the birds, who had sought shelter from the heat, were the only sounds that broke a silence half divine.

"The lily is beautiful alone," he said, "though the sweet leaves are weak; put lily and rose together, they improve and strengthen each other. Lima, look at me and not at Allan Water. Do you see no allegory in that?"

She would not say so.

"My dear, I have loved you," he said, "from the first moment I saw you. If I tried forever I could not tell you how much I love you. If every leaf on every tree, if every blade of grass in the meadows, if every single drop in the great sheet of Allan Water could speak, and they spoke forever, still they could not tell how much I love you, and I want you, my love, to be my wife."

"Your wife?" she repeated; "I have never thought of such a thing!"

"But marriage is the end of all true love," he cried. "And you, oh, Lima, if there be any truth in women's eyes, you love me."

The beautiful eyes drooped from his, the coy, sweet face turned now so that he should not see it.

"In spite of all my troubles," said Leon, "I esteem myself the most fortunate of men. To know you and to love you would compensate me for the loss of a crown or a kingdom. Oh, Lima, say you love me a little; I will win the rest. Say you will be my wife."

But the shy, sweet lips uttered no word — a very paroxysm of shyness seemed to have come over her.

“Lima, say one word to me,” he pleaded.

But Lima had no word. He placed both lily and rose in her hand :

“If you will not speak to me, Lima, settle my fate for me ; every moment of suspense is an hour of torture to me. If you love me, if you will be my wife, give the English rose to me and keep the French lily yourself. If—but I will not utter the words. I have faith in you ; you will try to love me ;” and a few minutes afterward the English rose — fresh, red, and blooming — was laid in his hands.

How he kissed her, thanked her, blessed her, words could not tell. It was the brief, sweet madness of love’s young dream — an hour never to be forgotten by either ; perhaps, the most perfectly happy one in either’s life. Until the day she died Lima Derwent preserved that lily, even though it was faded, withered and dead. It was an hour snatched from life, bright with brightness and love, sent straight from Heaven.

“I can hardly believe my own good fortune,” said Leon, after a time ; “to think that I, a poor, friendless exile, should win you. Why, Lima, you might be a queen.”

“I do not think many kings would come wooing me,” she said, laughingly ; but he cried :

“You are one of nature’s queens, Lima, and now that I have won your sweet love, and won you, tell me when you will marry me ?”

She shrunk back, scared and frightened.

“That will not be for a long time yet,” she said — “a long time, Leon.”

“Ah, no, Lima ! We love each other, why should we spend the youngest, brightest, and best years of our life apart ? I have always heard that early marriages are best. Let me go now to your parents and ask them ?”

Then the beautiful face grew pale and scared.

“Oh, Leon,” she cried, “I forgot !”

“Forgot what, my darling ?” he asked.

“They will never give me to you,” she said. “I for-

got, my father has other plans for me ; he does not like Frenchmen," and she clung to him with tears in her eyes.

He laughed merrily. To youth and love what matters fear ? what the opposition of parents ? what anything except their love ?

" Never mind, my darling, I will soon win the liking of father and mother—anything to gain you."

" You must make them like you, before you ask them about me," she said, shyly.

" I will—I will be patient, indeed," cried the last of the Soldanas, to whom patience was an unknown virtue. " I will do all I can to make them like me ; I will go this evening on some pretext or other—I know, I will ask your father if I may sketch the waters from the garden ; he will give me permission."

" That he will," said Lima, " and he will give you some of his sparkling cider ! He will be very kind and civil to you, unless he should happen to think that you want me, and then the story will be different."

" But why different, Lima ? I love you with all the strength and fervor of my heart ; I will work for you ; I will make you happy."

" It is not that," she answered ; " my father has made up his mind exactly what kind of a husband I shall have. I am to marry what he calls a gentleman farmer, and it will take some time to turn him from his idea."

" Then, Lima," said her handsome young lover, " I will tell you what our wisest plan will be ; we will keep our own secret ; we will say nothing of love or marriage until your parents have learned to like me."

He never for one moment doubted that they would so learn. He could see no reason why he should not be liked. He was accustomed, after all, to think more of himself as the last of the Soldanas, the last of a gallant race, the representative of one of the oldest families of France ; he knew that side of his life best ; that any one should dislike him, or look down upon him because he was a penniless French teacher, did not seem so natural to him. It never once occurred to him that Lima's parents would object to him. On the contrary, the idea

had crossed his mind that it was a great match for a simple country girl.

After all, he was the Comte de Soldana. He would have laughed at the notion of the miller despising his birth, his descent, his title, his nation, and everything belonging to him.

He would have laughed such a notion to scorn.

Still he was so deeply in love with Lima, and so anxious to win her for his wife that he became diplomatic; he saw that he must make his advances gently.

Before they parted they had made all arrangements; Leon was to make the acquaintance of the miller and his wife; he was to call continually at the mill, on one pretext or the other, until they would understand, and then he would ask them for Lima.

“How shall I live through all those weeks of suspense!” he cried. “Swear to me, Lima, that nothing shall change you, that nothing shall take you from me, nothing shall induce you to give me up. Promise me that you will love me truly and faithfully, and that you will love me alone so long as we both live.”

And she promised. How the promise was kept on her part and on his is what our story has to tell.

“Remember,” he said to her, “that a promise made over running water is doubly binding.”

“I shall remember,” she replied, and she did so.

CHAPTER VI.

"I CANNOT quite understand it," said the miller. "I hate all Frenchmen with a true British hatred. I should not mind if there was a Waterloo every day."

"But," interrupted his wife, "you must admit that there have been grand and noble men in France."

"I admit nothing of the kind," he replied. "I consider hatred of the French as one of the upholders of the British constitution. You say that Napoleon called us a nation of shop-keepers; I should call the French a nation of dancing-masters."

"That is not fair," said his wife, quickly; "they are more like a nation of soldiers."

The miller laughed good-naturedly.

"We will not quarrel about it," he said. "The whole French nation may do as it likes; the thing which puzzles me is why this young man comes here so often. He comes one day with a present for me, a dog — a real St. Bernard. What do I want with a Mount St. Bernard dog? Then he brings a canary, and yesterday I saw him with a great bunch of daphnes. What does it mean?"

But gentle Mrs. Derwent made no answer; she had her own fears as to what it meant; fears for the young Frenchman, who was so handsome, so gallant, so kind, so chivalrous, that she could not help liking him, himself.

Despite the miller's wonder at such a state of things, Leon had made his way. It was no unusual thing for him in the early morning to be seen in the meadows round the Mill of Allan, or rowing on the bright, deep waters; then would come a cheery greeting to the miller, a greeting so warm, so genial, so kindly, that, despite his hatred of the French, he was compelled to return it. An invitation to join the breakfast would at times follow, always a keen source of delight to the young lover, for

Lima presided, looking as beautiful, fresh, and blooming as a newly blown rose.

Again at noon, when the college morning hours were over, Leon would find some pretext for calling at the mill. But noon was a busy hour, the miller was away with his men, and Mrs. Derwent was engaged in household duties; neither of them knew how often the little boat was moored under the big bay-window of Lima's room.

During the long, beautiful summer evenings, when the sweet-scented hay lay in the meadows, and the hedges were a mass of brilliant bloom, how could one be surly?

When the miller met the handsome, gallant young fellow in the hay-fields or the lanes, or lingering by Allan Water, he could not decline speaking to him; and so great was the frank charm of his manner, that even when the miller had resolved that he would not exchange twenty words with him, it would end in an invitation to supper and a glass of cider. That was before he began to understand matters, or entertain even so faint an idea as to why he came there.

During those few weeks the lovers were on their guard. The mother saw more than the father did; she saw the beautiful girl's face flush and pale; she saw the trembling hands, she heeded the faltering voice, while the miller was blind and deaf to these signs.

"Is that young man going to live here altogether?" he cried out one Sunday afternoon, when Leon had contrived to elicit an invitation for tea from Mrs. Derwent.

"I should think not," his wife answered, with a smile, but there was a sense of deadly fear at her heart. What could he, young, brave, and handsome, want there? She knew, but she dreaded to own the truth even to herself.

It was a beautiful love story; old as love stories are there was something fresh and novel about this. The surroundings were so beautiful, so full of poetry; the young lover himself was so handsome and so princely; the girl he loved was so fair and graceful, and the love between them was deep and tender.

Were ever nights so fair as these on which he persuaded her to go with him round the wear while the moon shone on the waters; and the boat would seem to stop of its own accord near the water-lilies; and there was no one to overhear the passion of his words, no one to see the loving caresses that he lavished upon her? The Soldanas had always been proficient in the art of love-making. Were ever mornings so bright as these on which he met her at sunrise, and they spent long bright hours amongst the flowers?

“Do you think I may speak now?” was the young lover’s constant cry. “Oh, Lima, I am so tired of waiting! Your mother likes me, I know she does, and your father will like me in time, Lima; I am sure he will. Oh, let me speak to him. You do not know what I suffer—you do not know what a torture suspense is to me! I sit in the same room with you, and I dare not come near you—your beautiful face comes near me and I dare not kiss it! Do you know how often I stretch out my hands with an unutterable longing to take you to my heart, and there is only the cold empty air. Oh, Lima, Lima! let me speak!”

But she always made the same answer:

“Not yet, Leon—not just yet; let my father grow more accustomed to you.”

“But,” he would remonstrate, “unless I tell your father soon, he will find it out for himself; he will begin to ask himself why I am always at the mill; besides, if I do not tell him others will.”

“What others?” she asked.

He laughed a proud, happy laugh.

“My darling Lima,” he said, “there are very few people who do not know how I worship the Belle of Lynn, and I am proud of it. Let me speak, Lima. Your father cannot say nay to me; tell me why you are so afraid.”

“I do not like to tell you,” she answered. “I am sure it will hurt you.”

“I am sure it will not, Lima; tell me.”

“My father cannot endure Frenchmen. He will never let me marry you, Leon, because of that.”

"I am English enough, sweet Lima, in my love for you," he said. "It is a prejudice on his part, and I shall be able to overcome it."

He flung back his head with the air of a victorious young prince. What did the opinion and the prejudice of this English miller matter to the last of the Soldanas? If he were in his own land, on his own domain, this man would be so greatly his inferior that there would be no communication between them.

"We are so happy as we are," sighed the girl. "Do you know, Leon, that even the golden beauty of the summer seems to be part of our love? Why should we seek for a change?"

"Because, my darling, the change will come whether we seek it or not. Let us be ready for it."

"A few days," she pleaded; "only a few days more, Leon—"

"And then you will consent, Lima; you will make no more objections?"

"No," she replied, faintly; "but, Leon, I am sore afraid!"

"You need not be; you would not be if you knew how much I would dare to win you. I would swim over an ocean, I would cross a desert of sand, I would walk over read-hot plow-shares to reach you. Why need you fear?"

He drew her, with a passionate gesture, to his heart; he kissed the beautiful face, on which a faint shadow of pain lay; and Lima laid her arms round his neck.

"Tell me why you fear so much, my Lima? I fear nothing."

"We are so happy now," she whispered; "and what should we do if my father refused his consent?"

"He would never do anything of the kind," cried the ardent young lover. "Why should he? Why should he refuse to give you to me—because I am a Frenchman? Ah, Lima, there is no need to fear."

"There is, and I *do* fear; we are so happy now, Leon; I see you every day, sometimes more often than that even—let us be content."

"But, my darling," he cried, passionately, "this state of things cannot last! It is not only that I love you, but

I want to marry you ! I want you for my own ! I want a home, Lima, and you for its mistress. Do you not see and understand ? ”

“ Yes,” she whispered.

“ The end of all love is marriage,” he continued. “ I want you in my own home. I want you for my own. I cannot live without you.”

“ We are so much together, Leon,” she said.

“ But it is not the same thing. We will have a home in the trees, just as the birds build their nests. Oh, Lima, my heart grows warm when I think of it. A home, all our own, where you shall be mistress and queen, and I your loving lover.” He thought but little of the ways and means, she even less ; it was all love — love. “ I shall always be your lover, Lima. I shall always love you just as I do now — more, even, as the years pass on, but never less.”

She looked up into his face, a mist of tears dimming her lovely eyes.

“ I am so happy, Leon ; but if my father refused, what should we do ? ”

“ He will not refuse, my darling.”

“ But,” she persisted, “ what shall we do — if he does ? ”

“ Time enough to think of that emergency when it comes,” he replied. “ Let me ask him, I am quite sure all will come right.”

“ I am quite as sure it will not,” she said, sadly. “ I have a presentiment over it.”

“ Let me drive the presentiment away,” he cried, kissing the beautiful face until the smiles and the color came back to it. “ That is a proper way to treat a presentiment. Have another, Lima, which requires the same treatment.”

She laughed.

“ But, Leon,” she said, “ if my father says no, then we shall not be able to see each other.”

He laughed.

“ My darling, if a line of burning mountains parted us I should scale them. Nothing will ever keep me from you — nothing could. Do you remember the lines you

sung the other night, and they came floating across Allan Water?"

"I do not remember," she said.

"I do; and I thought at the time how well they applied to you and to me, if there should be opposition.

"My father he has locked the door,
My mother keeps the key,
But neither boltsnorbars shall keep
My own true love from me.'

"Let me speak to him, Lima, and have no fear. There is no spot upon earth where you could be hidden that I could not find you, and there is no power on earth that shall keep me from you."

So the words stand as he uttered them—to this day.

CHAPTER VII.

NEVER had the meadows yielded so much hay; never had the corn stood so tall, straight, and golden; never had the free and happy barley laughed more gayly in the sunshine; never had the gardens bloomed with fairer flowers; never had the orchards borne richer fruit. The miller, as he looked round him, felt his heart grow elated; here was plenty. Plenty of golden grain, plenty of rich promise; there would be more gold in the coffers he was filling for her, the daughter who was to him the very pride of his life: coffers that were filling fast, and all for her.

This summer was so fine and so fair, it seemed as though every blade of grass must yield good profit.

The miller was well content; the sun shone on his huge hay-stacks, on the rich harvest, on the mill that never rested, day or night, on the mill-stream, always flowing, and on Allan Water, stretching out far and wide; he was well content.

The day's work was over, the men had gone home, the birds were going to rest, the blue pigeons had gone to their cote, the sun was setting, and the rose-lights from

the clouds lingered on the waters ; the air was soft and balmy. "I will not go in-doors," said the miller to his wife ; "I will have my glass of cider out here."

"Out here," meant a beautiful little arbor covered with a wealth of climbing roses, standing under the shadow of the great limes, and looking over the broad expanse of Allan Water. An arbor that had been made purposely for the miller, where he could enjoy his pipe and his glass while he looked round on his possessions.

Here on this sweet July night he went to sit and enjoy the sunset, to enjoy the sparkling cider and his own thoughts. They were proud and happy ones. He had been a fortunate man ; no one but himself knew the amount that was daily increasing for the dowery of his beautiful daughter. He was well content over her ; she was beautiful by nature ; he had given her the education of a lady, and he held a fortune in his hand for her.

The very joy of his heart ! He meant her to marry an English gentleman. He was delighted to remember that Squire Leslie, of the Grange, had met him yesterday, and had spent fully five minutes in praising her, and had said there was not a more beautiful girl in England, and had very broadly hinted that he should be well pleased to visit the Mill of Allan.

"That is what will happen," the miller said to himself ; "some one worthy the name of an English gentleman will see her, love her, and marry her. It may be the squire himself, and I could not wish any brighter lot for my darling than that. To be the wife of a man like the squire, and mistress of a home like the Grange ! She would not go to him empty-handed either, my beautiful Lima ! "

A shadow fell where the rays of the setting sun had been shining brightly ; a fair, handsome head looked in through the trellis-work ; two eager, gray eyes scanned the miller's face.

"May I come in ?" said Leon de Soldana. "I want to speak to you, Mr. Derwent, very particularly."

This descendant of a fine old race had a deep, musical voice of his own, and there was in it a tone of command

which came from the ancestors who had led troops to battle, and whose word had been law with men.

The miller's ear was quick and keen enough to detect it, and his first impulse was to say :

" No, I would rather be alone ; " but the face was so handsome and the manner so courtly they proved irresistible.

" Yes, come in," said the miller, and the tall, shapely figure of the young Frenchman came out of the shadows the lime-trees cast, and stood by his side. There was a flush on the handsome face, and a light in the keen eyes that told a story.

There was an expression of something like impatience on the fine features, and a nervous quiver on the mouth that had all a woman's tenderness with a man's pride. He had said to himself, as he drew near the rose-covered arbor, that it was not in this fashion the lords of Soldana had been accustomed to woo ; they had not gone humbly cap in hand, to ask the gift of a daughter's hand. But he ! — he would do anything to win this beautiful Lima for his own. He stood by the miller's side, not in the least degree afraid, but wondering how he could tell this practical, matter-of-fact looking man of the deep worship and love that filled his heart for his daughter. He would not have hesitated or quailed for one second before a regiment of foes with drawn swords ; he would have remembered the battle-cry of the Soldanas, and would have dashed ahead. But before the sturdy matter-of-fact British miller he sat silent, not knowing how to begin his story.

" Well," said the miller, " you have something to say to me ? "

" I hawe, and I find myself a coward for the first time in my life," answered Leon ; and the miller looked curiously at him.

" I am sorry to hear that — it does not look well for what you are going to say. ' Conscience makes cowards of us all.' "

" It is not conscience in my case, but love," he replied, hotly. " I will tell you in a few words : I love your daughter — I love her with all the force and passion of

my heart, and I want you to give her to me to be my wife."

Profound silence. The words on his lips seemed to die away. The only change in the miller was that his comely, ruddy face grew white and livid.

"I love her," the young man went on, "as no one else ever could. She is the very sunlight of Heaven to me."

He might have been warned by the tremor of passion that passed over the miller's face; but he did not notice it; he was intent on what he had to say.

"Give her to me," he pleaded, "and I will love and serve her all my life. I will work for her, and make her the happiest wife in the world."

Still silence that was more terrible than words, and the miller's anger gathered force as the moments rolled on.

"I know," continued the young lover "that I am asking much. I am asking you for the greatest treasure you have in the world."

Brave as he was, he started back in wondering terror when the miller turned his white, angry face to him, and cried, in a voice of thunder:

"Hush! If you value your life, do not say another word! I—I am not master of myself when I am angry! I might commit *murder*."

"Murder!" cried the astonished young lover. "Surely you do not understand."

"I understand only too well," he cried, hoarsely. "You *dare* ask me for my daughter!"

"I dare," he replied, "by right of my love for her. I love her; my love is my excuse, if I need one."

The great veins stood out red and swelled on the miller's forehead and on his clinched hands.

"I am trying hard to control myself," he said, "but I am afraid."

"Speak fairly to me!" the young lover cried. "I have done you no harm, no injury; I have brought an honest, loving heart, and laid it at your daughter's feet; surely that is no wrong."

"No, it is no wrong," replied the miller, his voice trembling with passion—"no wrong, except that you

ought never to have dared to raise your eyes to her. Still, as you say you have done no wrong, I will be patient. You ask for my daughter; I answer 'no,' a thousand times 'no ;' my daughter shall never be a wife of yours. No need to prolong the discussion, there is not another word to say. 'No.' You hear my answer. Go!"

"I have a right to hear more," said the young lover. "Why do you send me away; why do you refuse to give me the girl I love, and who loves me?"

"Who *what*?" cried the miller.

"Who loves me," repeated Leon. "That is my claim to your hearing: your daughter loves me as I love her."

The very calm of passion, the white heat of anger came over the miller's face.

"My daughter *loves you*?" he cried. "I refuse to believe it! It is utterly impossible!"

"It is most perfectly true. I love her, and she loves me. Why will you not give her to me?"

"Give her to a penniless Frenchman? No, I have not brought her up as a lady for such a fate as that. I love her: she is the very core of my heart; but I would rather see her dead — ah! drowned and dead there in Allan Water — than give her to you."

"Why?" he asks, briefly.

"First, because you are a Frenchman, and my daughter shall marry no dancing-master, no foreigner; if she marries at all, her husband shall be a stalwart Englishman."

"I am as strong and fearless as any Englishman," said Leon de Soldana.

"Your strength has nothing to do with the matter. My daughter shall have an honest English gentleman for her husband, not a Frenchman; no, not even if he were a king."

"I am not a king," said Leon gravely, "but I am as well-born as many a monarch who has sat upon a throne."

"What?" cried the miller, and it is no exaggeration to say that he roared rather than shouted.

"It is true," said the young man, "my family is one of the oldest in France. My ancestors fought like heroes in the Crusades; many a king has reigned less nobly born

than I. Poor as I am, much as you despise me, I who stand a suppliant before you am Leon, Count de Soldana."

"A penniless count!" cried the miller; "you could not have said more to ruin yourself in my esteem. I hate all foreigners, I hate all aristocrats: a man with a title is odious in my sight. If any man can be more than a radical, I am that man. And you think the paltry, empty title of count will please me. Let that pass; count or no count you are a Frenchman — that is reason enough for me. I would rather give my daughter in marriage to Hodge, the plowman, than to you. You are poor, and my beautiful Lima is not, you understand, to marry a poor man. I have brought her up as a lady — those little white hands of hers shall never be stained with toil as her mother's have been. She shall marry a gentleman. I have saved a fortune for her. She is not for you. Go!"

But Leon de Soldana stood motionless, while the passionate torrent of words ran on.

CHAPTER VIII.

FINDING that his words produced no effect, the miller repeated them, but the young lover held his ground.

"You have no right to let prejudice guide you," he said. "You are not just."

"I am more than just, if that be possible," cried John Derwent. "Do you think I have educated my daughter and worked hard to save a fortune for her in order that she may marry a man who has no home, no money, no prospects?"

"I shall make a home, and I have prospects," he answered, gravely. Do listen to me in patience, even if only for a few minutes. If you will give her to me, I will make a pretty home for her. There is a beautiful little cottage near Lynn, just what she likes, lying in the midst of the trees. I will take that and furnish it; I can save money for that; and then I will double my income by teaching French in the town of Lynn. I will work as man never worked before, if only you will give her to

me; and we should be rich, because we should be happy."

The scorn that deepened on the miller's face was wonderful to see.

"No," he replied; "there is no prayer you could make, there is nothing you could say or do which could for one moment induce me to consent. My daughter shall never be your wife — do not let me hear another word of it. It can never be!"

The young lover raised his head gallantly.

"I do not see that you have the right to make your own daughter miserable for life just because she is your daughter!"

"I have a right to do what I like with my own," said the miller, doggedly.

"You have no right to make any one miserable, whether they belong to you or not," said Leon.

"Now," said the miller, "I have heard enough. From this moment you may give up all thoughts of my daughter, and you must not come near my house again!"

"You seem to think little enough of the pain you will give your daughter," said Leon, bitterly.

"She will not suffer much pain if she has the spirit I give her credit for. Does she know the foolish errand on which you have sought me?"

"Yes," was the brief reply.

"I do not believe it!" cried the miller, fiercely. "She knows me and my opinions too well to think that I should give my consent to her marriage with a penniless foreigner, a man with an empty title, forsooth! She knows me too well for that. Now, you go; keep to your teaching, and leave love-making alone. Since you do not seem inclined to leave me, I will go into the house, where I do not ask you to follow me. Good-night."

Without another word the miller went away, leaving the young lover with bitter desolation in his heart, bitter anger against this homely matter-of-fact man who had scoffed at his ancestors, laughed at his title, and refused him his daughter. It was not thus that the Soldanas had been treated when they went forth to woo.

“I will have her,” he said to himself; “she loves me, and I will have her, in spite of all.”

And he sung the lines :

“ ‘ My father he has locked the door,
My mother keeps the key;
But neither boltsnorlocks shall keep
My own true love from me.’

“ Nothing shall keep me from her—I shall win her in spite of all opposition, in spite of all obstacles. I would win her from the very arms of death.”

But it was in vain that evening that he lingered round the banks of Allan Water; there was no gleam of a blue dress, no bright sheen of golden hair, no lovely young face flushed with delight at meeting him.

When night fell he unfastened the boat and rowed across Allan Water; but there was no light in the window, no sound of sweet music floating over the waters. All was silent; even the very winds were cold and still.

There was, for the first time, the sound of angry words in the Mill of Allan. The miller had gone home angry and ill-content; nothing could have been more annoying, more irritating to him than this. If one of his own plowmen had fallen in love with his daughter, and had asked her hand in marriage, he would not have been one half so angry. A penniless Frenchman, a teacher in a school, a man with a title that was not worth a shilling—nothing could have been worse! And for him to say that his beautiful Lima loved him! More and more angry grew the miller. Why, what would Squire Leslie say if he heard this? The Belle of Lynn to marry a poor teacher, who had neither home nor money!—she who had been brought up a lady, and was to have a fortune.

He went into the pretty parlor that night with a frown on his face for the first time. The windows of the room did not look over Allan Water, but on to the beautiful flower-garden. There, in the garden, he saw his wife, who was busy tying up some carnations, and his daughter, who was standing with her face turned to the west, wondering why her lover had not returned to her, and why there was no sign of him near Allan Mill. **That**

beautiful girl to marry a penniless Frenchman! Never while the sun shone, and he lived to prevent it!

He opened the glass door that led to the garden.

"Helen," he cried to his wife, "I want to speak to you!"

He saw his daughter start at the unusual sound of anger in his voice. She came forward with rapid steps.

"I want you both," said the miller. "I have been vexed and angry; but I will try to be calm while I tell you. Helen—Lima, my darling, that young Frenchman has been here, and has dared to ask me if he may marry you!"

"Oh, father!" cried the girl, hiding her blushing face in her hands.

"Can you believe it?" cried the miller, fuming with rage—"a teacher, a Frenchman, a man without a shilling, and boasting of an empty title to boot! Oh, my darling," he added, with a sudden outburst of tenderness, as he clasped her to his breast—"my darling, I did not make you a lady for this! I have sent him away, and told him that he is never to come here again."

A low wail of pain came from the girl's lips; but he was too excited to hear it.

"There will be no repetition of the nonsense, for I have told him he is never to cross the threshold of my door again."

Then the pale face looked wistfully at him, and a voice from which all the music had died, said:

"Father, do not say that; you will kill me if you say that—for I love him."

He clasped her with fierce passion to his breast.

"Nay, my darling, you will not die; you will soon forget him; he is not half good enough for you. We will find an English husband for my Lima."

She shrunk from him, pale and scared.

"I do not want any one else. Ah, father! do you not understand? I love him; and I love him all the more because he is very poor and friendless, and is an exile from his own land!"

"Nonsense." said the miller, brusquely. "It shows

what his native land thinks of him when he is sent away from it."

"Nay, father, that is not like you—it is not just!" cried the girl. "His poverty and exile are his misfortune, not his fault."

"All right, my dear," said the miller, impatiently, "we need not say any more about him; we have done with him now."

"Father," she interrupted, "you cannot put out all the sunshine of my life in this fashion—you cannot mean what you say! You have always been so kind to me—no father was ever so kind to a daughter as you have been to me—you will not break my heart or make me miserable for life. Do you remember, when I was quite a little girl and wanted anything you taught me always to come to you! You have never refused me one wish—you have never been unkind to me in all my life; surely you will not begin now!"

"I would not hurt one hair of your dear head, my lady lassie," said the miller. "You are young and have no experience. I shall prevent you from throwing yourself away on a young fellow who has nothing to recommend him except a handsome face. You must not do that. You have been brought up a lady, and you will have a good fortune; I have worked hard for it, and I have saved it for you. You must marry an English gentleman."

"Father," said the girl, while the tears ran down her face, "do not break my heart. Let me marry the man I love."

"You will be all right, my dear; you need not break your heart," he went on, with rough tenderness; "your mother must take you out a little. You shall go to the sea-side—anything to cheer you. I could curse the man," he cried, with sudden ferocity, "when I see the tears on your face."

She shrunk from him, more pale and scared than before.

"Do not say such terrible things," she cried; but an expression of great resolution had come over the miller's face.

"Let us make an end of this, Lima," he said. "I

would not refuse you anything else in the wide world, and I will make your life as happy as life can be, but we must have no more of this. Listen to me: I will never give my consent to this marriage—never, and I have forbidden the young man ever to come here again. Take care, you, Helen, my wife, and you, Lima, my daughter, that he is never seen here."

"Oh, father, be pitiful to me," she cried. "I cannot bear it."

"You must choose, my darling, between him and me," said the miller, and his voice was hoarse with emotion; "between him and me, my lady lassie. I am the father who loves you, nursed you, guided your little footsteps, taught your little lips to pray, who has worked for you. I went without many a thing that the money might be put aside for you. You have only known this young man a few weeks; will you give me up for him?"

"No," she cried, clinging to him, with sobs and tears. "You know I could never give you up, father."

"But, my darling, it lies between us; you must give up your father, or the man whom you consider your lover."

"How can I tear my heart in twain?" she cried.

"Better to cry a little now than to cry much more in the years to come," said the miller. "Here, wife, come and console her; but remember there is to be no more of this—the young man is never to be seen here again."

And the girl flung herself, weeping, on her mother's breast, while the miller left the room without another word.

CHAPTER IX.

DURING the first few minutes that the mother was left with her child she said nothing, but smoothed the golden hair with a loving hand, then she kissed the beautiful, tear-stained face.

“Do not cry so bitterly, Lima—tell me about it; I wish I had known, I should have warned you; yet I had my fears. Do you love him so very much, child?”

“I love him with all my heart, mother,” was the answer given, with bitter sighs and tears.

“But, my dear, you know so little of him—he is a stranger to you.”

“Ah, no; he has never seemed like a stranger. You will not be angry with me, mother, if I tell you!”

“I could not be angry with you, my dear, for this,” said the gentle mother, with a loving memory of the days when the miller had wooed her, and she had thought herself the happiest girl in the wide world.

“Do you remember, mother,” she said, “that afternoon when Mrs. Grey came over to talk to you about him—about his coming to the farm? I had never seen him then, but I thought so much of him, and I heard how handsome and kind and brave he was. It seemed to me that he was quite different from other men. I thought so much about him—and I had not seen him then.”

The beautiful face grew crimson, and the fair head drooped.

“I know I ought to be ashamed of it,” she said, “but I could not help it; after I had seen him and spoken to him, I am afraid I thought of nothing else. I loved him so much. I wonder if the same thing comes to other girls. After I had spoken to him he seemed to be part of myself—part of my life—and I could not tell how it was. I saw his face everywhere; whether I was walking or sleeping, thinking or dreaming, there it was, the beautiful gray eyes looking into mine. I cannot describe it,

but love of him seemed to enter into everything ; it was in the sunshine, in the bloom and perfume of the flowers, it was even in the shining light that lies on Allan Water. All my life that lay behind me seemed to be nothing ; there was nothing in it. Oh, I know it was all wrong or strange, but I seemed only to have begun life from the hour in which I first saw him. You see, mother," she added, with the calm of desperation, " I could not give him up. It would be like tearing my very heart in twain. I could not do it."

" But, my dear, if your father wills that it shall be so, you must."

" Ah, no — no. I did not make the love to live in my heart, nor can I drive it away. I cannot kill it. I wanted to tell you, mother, but I was afraid. I thought it would be better to wait until you knew more of him. It is for that reason he has been here so often, that you might learn to love him. You cannot help it, mother. It seems to me that every creature who looks upon his face must love him."

" My dear Lima, if it were so, your father would like him," said the kindly woman.

" Nothing could take him from my life," she continued, stretching out her tender, white arms. " If he is many hours away, the light goes from the sun — I count the minutes ; I say to myself, ' He will be here at noon,' I wait until noon comes ; but if the noon stretched out into weeks, and he never came, I should die—I should die of the blank cold and desolation. When night falls I say to myself, ' He will come with the morning light.' When morning has been and gone, I long for the setting of the sun ; I know he will come then. Why, mother," she continued, raising her fair face, all flushed and tear-stained, " what should I do with my life if he went out of it ? What could I do but die ? "

" You should not have let yourself love him so much, Lima."

" How could I help it ? The love came to me unasked, unawares. I loved him before I knew his name, or anything much about him, and I shall love him until I die ! Mother, you understand — you loved my father. You

understand — my heart beats when I hear his name ; my hands tremble, and my face burns when he speaks to me ! Oh, mother ! ” she continued, with a passionate burst of tears, “ do you not see that my heart has gone from me, and clings to him ? You must not let him be sent from me. I shall droop and die. Speak for me and plead for me ! ”

But the miller’s wife knew him better than his daughter did. She knew that if his mind was once made up to any course of action nothing ever moved or changed him, nothing altered his opinion ; he was firm as a rock ; and she knew perfectly well that he would never consent to his daughter’s marriage with the Frenchman ; dearly as he loved her, he would not give his consent to save her life.

What could she do or say to this fair young daughter of hers, whose whole heart had gone out to the stranger ? How could she comfort or console her ?

“ You must plead for me , ” the girl continued. “ I am young, I know, and you may think that in time I could forget him. Ah, no ! If I live to be ever so old I should never love or care for any one else ! He is my first — he will be my last and only love ! Oh, mother, make my father understand that — make him see it ! ”

“ I will do my best , ” said Mrs. Derwent. “ Now go to rest, my dear . ”

“ Have you nothing to say to comfort me ? ” she cried. “ Have you no word ? What shall I do when the dark to-morrow dawns, and does not bring him to me ? What shall I do ? ”

“ Have patience, my dear ; patience conquers all things . ”

“ Patience will not give me back my love, if my father will not let him come , ” she cried. “ Oh, mother, I have never lain awake and cried all night before, but I shall to-night ; last night I dreamed that I was with him, and we were rowing on Allan Water ; how will the long dark hours pass ? And to-morrow he will not come. I did not know that my father could be so cruel . ”

"He means it all in kindness," said the anxious mother.

"He will break my heart; how can that be true kindness to me? My father thinks more of money than money's worth. My lover is a gentleman—a nobleman, but because he has no money, my father, does not like him. Money cannot buy happiness—or love."

"It is not altogether a question of money," interrupted Mrs. Derwent; "you know how much your father has always disliked foreigners, above all, Frenchmen. You know how he has lived for you, Lima; he would have you educated, he has deprived himself of everything he liked best, in order that you might have a fortune, and his very heart is fixed on marrying you to an English gentleman. Do you not see what a terrible disappointment it would be to him?"

"But how much worse, oh, mother, think how much worse for me. My father would soon forget, and when he saw me happy, he would be happy, while I—oh, how can he be so cruel to me?" She fell on her knees in a passion of tears, so bitter, so unavailing, that the mother's heart ached.

"Do be patient my dear!" she said.

"Oh, mother," cried the girl, "you may as well take the sunshine from the flowers and bid them live."

Long after the busy mill had ceased, and the water lay still; long after the moon had risen and the stars were shining bright, the miller's wife lay wide awake listening to that faint sobbing, which was the most terrible sound she had ever heard. Laughter and smiles, bright words, the gleam of happiness, had always been associated in her mind with her daughter; she could not endure this sound of bitter wailing and tears.

Once the miller woke when the sound of that bitter weeping and bitter sighs seemed to pervade the quiet house; and when his wife told him the sound he heard was his daughter weeping, he grew angry and denied it. It was the wind wailing over the water, he said. And when she begged him not to be hard on this their only child, for that she was fragile and tender of heart, he laughed hoarsely and answered that he knew what was

best for her; his beautiful Lima should never be given to a penniless Frenchman; he would see the whole French nation sunk under the Red Sea first; his beautiful Lima should marry an English gentleman; a few tears would not kill her. And when the mother, weeping, said:

"She has never had to weep before," he answered, that it was the law of nature that women should weep.

"What does her own song say?" he quoted; "'Men must work and women must weep.' If she weeps now, wife, she will shed no tears afterward. If I let her marry this Frenchman, her tears will never stop. I know what is best for her, Helen. She will be all right in a few days, and then you will be glad that I did as I am doing."

All the same he did not like to hear the sound of weeping and wailing, and the next morning Lima was ill. There was a dreadful blank at the usually cheerful breakfast-table. No beautiful face, no bright eyes, no sweet voice; the sunlight itself was not more missed than she was, but the miller would not yield one inch.

"Headache? It would be far better for her to get up and go out into the fresh air."

But when, some hours afterwards, he met her as she was walking down to Allan Water, he saw that even the fresh morning air had brought no color to her pale face, no light to her dim eyes. How little he understood the desolation that filled her heart. There was Allan Water laughing in the sunlight, but where was he, the handsome young lover, with the loving eyes and sweet, caressing words? What was all the loveliness on earth without him? The miller went to her and kissed her. He found her hands and face cold as death.

"Have a good, brisk walk, my darling," he said: "it will bring the roses back to your face."

But she sighed as she went along the well-known ways without him. Alas! without him there was no beauty even on the banks of Allan Water.

CHAPTER X.

A QUIET shadow seemed to have fallen over the mill; the light seemed to have passed from life; there was no sound of music or laughter, no bright voices, no songs; all seemed quiet, grave, and strange. Lima made no complaint; she looked tired, pale, and languid, but after a few days she fell into the usual routine; she helped her mother, wrote her father's letters, she took up her books, and more than once in the evening, when the miller asked her for music, she sung, but never the favorite ballad of Allan Water. The spirit and life seemed to have left her; she cared no more for the rambles in the woods, she went no more in the clover meadows and green lanes, she never sought the banks of Allan Water. It seemed to her that if she went out and met him suddenly she should fall down dead. In vain the sunshine wooed her, in vain the beautiful water rippled and gleamed, in vain did rose and lily bloom and birds sing; she shut herself in her room and tried hard to obey her father—she tried to forget Leon. She might as well have tried to stem the mountain torrents when the wind forces them; the more she tried to forget him the more deeply she loved him. She grew more and more miserable, the color faded from her beautiful face, and her eyes grew dim. Mrs. Derwent was very unhappy over her; more than once she drew the miller's attention to his daughter.

“The girl is fading,” she said. “Oh, John, relent or we may lose her, and then!”

“It would be better to lose her by death,” said John Derwent, “than to give her to that Frenchman; besides, she will not die. Do you remember the old lines:

‘Men have died, and worms have eaten them,
But not for love.’

She will not die; many a girl loses the color and light

from her face, but they come back again. It is better for her to suffer a little now than more later on."

But the time came when he himself felt anxious about her. She had only been three weeks parted from her lover, and she was already but the shadow of her former self.

Never was struggle more desperate in the heart of any girl. She loved her father—she had no wish to disobey him ; she was grateful to him, and wished to please him ; she could not endure to pain or vex him ; she could not bear even to see the brightness of his face dimmed. On the other hand, she loved her young lover with all her heart ; she had given to him the love of her life—her heart had gone from her and clung to him. She did not care to live unless her life were spent with him. She knew that if she sent one line to him, if she met him, if she exchanged one word with him, it would be all over with her ; while she remained shut away from him she could obey her father ; once with him, she did not think it possible. So the struggle in her mind was a terrible one.

It was the old story of duty and love. There were times when duty seemed to win the day—when she tried her best to forget the sweetness of her love story, when she prayed Heaven to help her to forget her lover, when she clung to her father with fondest affection, and the miller's face would brighten, and he would congratulate himself that all had succeeded as he prophesied. Then the reaction would come, and love would overpower duty ; there would be days of bitter tears and sighs, nights without sleep, hours that seemed like endless days, and days that seemed like endless weeks—when she could not bear the light of the sun, the song of the birds, or the fragrance of the flowers—when she could not bear that her eyes should rest on the beautiful stretch of waters, and she longed for nothing but the rest and the silence of death.

For love is the strongest and most terrible passion that ever takes hold of the human heart—the most powerful, the most to be dreaded, yet the most to be desired—and love had taken full possession of the girl's heart.

Yet she fought her fight. There came a night when the August moon shone brightly on Allan Water, and she heard so plainly the dipping of the oars in the stream, and she knew, as though she had seen him, that her lover was under the window, waiting and longing to see her. She had but to draw aside the hangings, to open the window, and then all the bliss of a regained Paradise would be hers.

She knew how the handsome face would be raised to the window ; how the longing, wistful eyes would watch for her shadow ; how he would listen to the faintest sound that gave token of her presence ; how great the temptation was—how great the struggle. At one moment she felt that she must go ; she must open the window and spring down to him, and he could row her over the water, away where the water lilies slept, away in fairy-land. Nothing stood between her and that glimpse of intense happiness, seeing and speaking to her lover, but her sense of duty and her conscience.

Conscience forbade her to draw up the blinds and open the window, to look down on the upraised face of her lover, beautiful as a dream in the moonlight, to spend a few moments with the young lover who loved her so dearly. Conscience was the winner. She would not go because her father had forbidden her to see him again. Conscience was the winner ; but at what a price ! A night of bitter regret and passionate tears—a day of languor and misery.

She looked out on the broad sheet of water when morning rose, and she saw that her lover had left a great heap of floating water-lilies under her window, so at least she might know he had been there.

The passionate regret seized her ; how cruel she had been not to go near him, not to look at him, not to speak to him ; a passionate cry of sorrow broke from her. It was hard for any one to live in such a struggle.

She made one last and desperate appeal to her father, but he would not listen.

“A little more patience,” he said, “and you will have forgotten him. You will see the truth of my words some day. If I were willing—if I gave my consent to your

marriage to-morrow, you would repent it with your whole heart in a few months. When you grow older and know more, you will know that no English father would care to give his beloved child to a French noble—if he be a noble—which I doubt very much, after all. You will find out later on how true my words are."

No prayer that she could pray, no tears, no passion or grief or pain could move him, no words soften him, no persuasions induce him to change his opinions. It was banishment from her lover and life without him. She made no more appeals, she saw and understood that her father would be firm at any cost.

She marvelled much, poor child, that life should have taken so strange a turn for her; that all its freshness, brightness, and hope should have died so suddenly; why that one dream of beauty and sweetness, almost divine, should have been given her to die in such a short time.

Hundreds of girls before her, and hundreds since have had the same struggle between duty and love, between father and lover; perhaps none have felt it more keenly or suffered so much from it.

By this time Lima's sad, sweet love story was known; the sympathy of the young was with the girl and her lover, the sympathy of the old with the miller. The story was discussed in many of the humble households around Lynn, and there was much wonder how it would end—whether the miller would yield, whether the young Frenchman would grow tired of his ardent pursuit and go away, or whether time would lessen the girl's love and another lover prevail.

There came a calm, bright Sunday morning when the warm languor of heat seemed to lie over the land, throbbed in the blue ether, and trembled in the golden haze on the banks of Allan Water, and even by the mill, the sound of the chiming of the church bells at Lynn was heard.

The miller listened attentively.

"That is a sure sign of settled fair weather," he said, "when we can hear the bells from Lynn."

He would have obeyed their summons and have gone to church but that some of the machinery of the mill had

gone wrong, and he was afraid to leave it. Mrs. Derwent was not well, and when the Lynn bells rang out their solemn peal there was no one at the mill to respond to it but Lima.

"Go to church, Lima," said the miller, looking at the girl's pale face; "the walk over the fields will do you good."

She had just been wondering what she should do during the whole of that long, golden day; how she should get through the hours that would not be brightened by one glimpse of her lover—long hours, while the sun would ride high in the heavens, and the earth droop under its burning rays.

"I will go to church, father," she said; and then one of the prettiest sights seen that summer was the miller's lovely daughter as she tripped through the green meadows, prayer-book in hand. The light footsteps that did not crush the flowers in the grass; the beautiful face, almost more lovely in its pallor and sadness than in the flush of health; the slender, girlish figure in the dress of pure white. No fairer picture could be seen.

Perhaps the birds of the air hastened to tell her lover that she was there; no sooner had she crossed the clover meadow and gone into the green lane that led to Lynn than a sudden burst of glorious sunshine came over her, and she was looking once more into the face she loved **so well.**

CHAPTER XI.

SHE had no time to think whether it was right or wrong, no time to listen to the voice of conscience or duty. She remembered in that moment nothing in the wide world except that he was there, his handsome face smiling into her own, his eyes so frank and fearless looking into hers. He had clasped her hands in his, and the whole earth was brightened and gladdened by his presence.

"My darling," he cried, in a rapture of delight—never mind that it was Sunday, when every one is expected to behave with extra decorum; never mind that, although it was a deep shady lane, other people might see them—he drew her to his heart and kissed her in a passion of love and pain; "my darling, my eyes were growing blind from want of seeing you. Now that I have you I cannot let you go! Speak one word to me—say that you are pleased to see me."

There was no need for words, as he saw when she looked at him; and then he was struck by the change in her; her face seemed to him lovelier than ever; there was a pathos in its beauty which was perhaps even more attractive than its brightness had been.

"Why, Lima," he cried, "how ill you look; how thin and pale you are! What has stolen the roses from your face and the light from your eyes?"

He kissed the pale face and the white eyelids; he seemed beside himself in this great joy of meeting her, while she stood pale and silent.

"I am so glad—so delighted!" he cried, almost incoherently. "I thought the time never would come. I have longed to see you. Providence or fate—which is it, Lima?—is kinder than your father. There has been some little pity for us. Oh, Lima, do not leave me again!"

The soft chiming of the bells at Lynn came to them with the sweet song of the birds, and the sweet odor of the flowers; a soft, sweet chime that floated over the trees.

It seemed to the girl that a sudden burst of golden sunlight had fallen over her, and she was dazed by its brightness. It was like going from darkness and cold into sunshine and warmth, and in the bewilderment of her happiness she forgot all about the wrong. Slowly the color was returning to her beautiful face, slowly the light of love and happiness was coming back to her eyes.

With a sigh of unutterable content she seemed to recognize the fact that she was with him ; with a low cry that was half love, half pain, she laid her arms round his neck and hid her face on his breast.

"Oh, Leon," she said, gently, "I should like to die here. I would rather a hundred times over die here with your arms round me, than go back to the life which is so terrible without you. I have not complained ; I have said nothing ; but my heart is breaking."

"You need never go back to it, Lima," he said. "Why should we both be miserable ? I have been thinking it over, and it seems to me unreasonable ; why should both our lives be spoiled because your father does not like Frenchmen ? It is absurd. You love me, and I love you ; I want you to be my wife, and you are quite willing ; why should we both be made miserable for life ?"

"My father has the power to forbid our marriage," she said.

"Nothing of the kind. I know that parents have certain rights over their children, but they cannot be pushed too far. No father has a right to say to his daughter that she shall marry this one and shall not marry another —"

But she interrupted him.

"Oh, yes, Leon, a father has that right," she said.

"I do not believe it," he cried. "No one has, or ought to have, the power of forbidding those who love, to marry."

He uttered the words clearly and distinctly ; in the after-days they returned as so many stabs from a sharp sword, and wounded him.

"This is my belief," he said, "that while children are children they owe implicit obedience to their parents,

and ought to render it—it is the law of Heaven and of man—but when the child is grown into man or woman, and wishes to marry the object beloved, then do I not acknowledge the right of parents to interfere."

Lima was silent for a few minutes, little dreaming how in the after years these words would be recalled to her. Then she said, slowly :

"I cannot think that, Leon. I should not like to marry unless my father gave his consent. I do not think I would dare marry if he actually forbade me to do so. It seems to me that such a marriage would never carry with it a blessing."

Sweetly, softly, over the trees came the chiming of the bells at Lynn ; the birds sung sweetly under the shelter of green boughs. Suddenly Lima looked up at him.

"Leon, I must go," she said. "My father sent me to church, and the bells will soon cease ringing. I must go."

But he drew her nearer to him.

"Not while I have arms to hold you, sweetheart. That would be flying in the very face of fate. Here we are in the midst of the bright sunshine, brought together after dreary weeks of absence and misery—brought together by fate and most happy fortune—and then you want to go ! Ah, no, sweetheart ! let the bells chime and the birds sing, but you will stay here. I shall make a prison of my arms, and keep you in it."

"But," she cried, in deep distress, "it would not be right, Leon ; my mother told me to go to church, and I must go. It would be wrong for me to spend this morning here with you."

"Just a little wrong, but think how very delightful. Be fair, Lima. You have given how many weeks to your father, and you must not refuse two hours to me—two hours out here in the sunlight ? We will go to the clover meadow, and sit under the shade of the lime-trees, where we can see Allan Water. Oh, my sweetheart, my love, give me this gleam of happiness !"

"But, Leon," she said, half yielding the while, "the very bells seem to be chiming 'Come to church — come to church !'"

"And the birds are singing 'Stay here — stay here !'

Come, Lima, my sweetheart. Fate has been kind to us this morning ; do not let us fly in her face, or she may never be so kind again."

Still she drew back, and did not touch the hand he extended to her.

" Leon," she said, gravely, " if I do this — if I stay away from church and spend the morning out in the fields with you, it will be the first time in my life that I have deliberately and wilfully done wrong."

" As I said, darling, it will be just a little wrong, but most delightful," he replied. " We will not stop to talk about it ; let us take the goods that fortune has offered us. I want to talk to you ; I want to persuade you to do something that will make me very happy."

The woman who hesitates is lost. Lima hesitated. The bells chimed " Come ; " the birds sang " Stay ; " duty said " Go ; " love said " No ; " but Leon settled the matter when he said :

" If you will be cruel — if you will leave me, there is but one alternative, I shall go with you, and then — then you will see. Come with me, sweet ; let us enjoy the hour that fortune has given us."

The next minute she had turned her beautiful face to the clover meadows ; a green bank ran under the tall lime-trees, a bank that was covered with wild flowers and meadow-sweet ; the broad, beautiful stretch of Allan Water lay before them ; but they could not see the mill, it was hidden from them by the great green trees. He found the prettiest nook for her, and she sat down amongst the tall blossoms of the meadow-sweet ; he flung himself by her side, while the sun shone on and the waters rippled slowly by.

" Now I can understand," he said to her, " what the Garden of Paradise was like. Oh, Lima, you must not leave me again. I feel like one who has been dead, and has come back to life. No one has the power to part us ; no one can, for love has the strongest chain, and the strongest rights, and I want you, my beautiful sweetheart, to listen to me ; why need we be miserable any longer ; why should we not be married and happy ? My days

are one longing for you, and you are no less miserable yourself. Why should it be?"

An old saying is that "a little chink lets in great light;" it is equally true that the least deviation from the strict path of duty entails the gravest consequences. If beautiful Lima Derwent had obeyed the voice of her conscience, had obeyed the voice of the bells that rang out "Come to church," in all probability the great tragedy of her life would have been averted. She might in time have forgotten this ardent, passionate love of her youth; but she was deaf to those two voices, and heard only that of her lover, which said "Come."

"Lima," he pleaded, and every sweet voice in nature pleaded with him—"Lima, do not let us sacrifice our youth—our love—our happiness! We have but one life; let us enjoy it, and we cannot enjoy it apart. Be my wife at once! If we wait until your father consents, we may wait until our hair turns gray. Be my wife! I would not persuade you to do anything wrong, sweet Lima; but why should we spend our lives in misery when we might be so happy? Look at the birds, how happy they are—look at the flowers, how happy they are, too! In this world so full of brightness, and beauty, and love, why should we two sit apart, wretched and forlorn, parted in eternal sorrow and in eternal tears? Why should we?"

And she listened to him, her beautiful face drooping shyly from him, but gradually believing all he said to be true.

"My darling," he said at last, "let me plead to you in the old lines we both love so well; they might have been written for us:

"My father he has locked the door,
My mother keeps the key;
But neither bolts or locks shall keep
My own true love from me."

Oh! my true love and dear love, listen to me, and to me only; let nothing part us but death, and may Heaven keep death far from us. Say you will be my wife?"

There was a word whispered over the meadow-sweet, and then the tragedy of a life began.

CHAPTER XII.

ONE o'clock at the mill, and no Lima appeared. The dinner-table was set. The miller went restlessly from room to room; his wife sat at the window watching with anxious eyes the fields through which she should pass. The bells of Lynn had long ceased chiming, the air was warm and still, the flowers bent their heads as though heavy with the heat, the birds were silent in the sultry languor of the mid-day sun. No Lima. The shadows were lengthening, and the mother's watching grew more and more unhappy. Where was she, and what had happened? Was she ill and unable to come home? Should she go in search of her?

Ah! there, where the sunbeams fall brightly, was the gleam of a white dress between the trees; that was Lima, and a sensation of relief came to the mother's heart at the sight of her. She hastened to the garden to meet her, to ask her why she had been so long absent—where she had wandered. But when she gazed into her daughter's face she saw that all was changed; this was quite another girl than the one who had left home a few hours ago. This girl had a light in her eyes which seemed as though it could never fade. There was a lovely flush on her face, and her lips were like crimson flowers; she was transfigured, and the mother thought nothing more beautiful had ever been seen than this radiant maiden with the love-lit eyes.

"Mother," she said, gently, and her voice had in it a faint ring of music and gladness—"mother," she repeated, "am I late?"

"Very late, my darling, and we have been very anxious over you. *Where have you been?*"

In one moment all flashed before her. Where had she been? Her hands were still warm with her lover's clasp, her heart was still beating with the sound of her lover's

words, her pulse throbbing with the delight of his presence ; and suddenly she remembered all — that this was the lover whom she had been forbidden to see. Deeper and deeper grew the crimson on the beautiful face, and then the miller joined the little group. They were standing outside the porch, where the white, starry jasmine was all in bloom — a group that contained in itself all the elements of a simple tragedy. The father stern and unflinching, the mother tearful and suppliant, the daughter blushing, half trembling with fear, yet strong in her determination to be true to her lover and to her love.

“ You are late, Lima,” said her father.

Do what she could, she could not throw off those signs of delight that she had seen him, spoken to him, that he had caressed her and worshipped her, and asked her over and over again to be his wife. It was all told, all written in the face that only a few hours since was pale with misery and shadowed with grief.

Father and daughter stood face to face — the father who had loved his child so well, and the child who, until now, had known no wish but his.

The father, stern and unyielding ; the daughter, ready to encounter anything now for her lover’s sake.

“ Yes,” said the miller, looking fixedly at her. “ Yes, you are late, and you have not been to church. Mrs. Grey went home an hour ago ; she had been there, but she told me she had not seen you. *Where have you been ?* ” His eyes, bright with anger, were fixed on her face, and seemed to read her very soul. “ Where have you been ? You left home pale, sorrowful, your head bent ; I watched you walking through the fields ; you come back bright, erect, radiant, your own old self. What has changed you ? *Where have you been ?* ”

She must either tell the truth or a direct lie, and she, sweet, simple, loving soul, had never told a wilful lie in her whole life ; she shrank from it now, she could not do it. It might have saved her ; but she would not be saved at the price ; she could not stoop to a lie.

Yet a spasm of fear came over her when she saw the miller’s angry eyes ; never had they looked at her with that expression before.

"Where have you been?" he repeated, in a voice of thunder; then her natural courage came to the rescue.

"Do not ask me, father," she answered. "I do not want to tell you; you will only be angry and vexed."

"I will know," he cried. "Tell me at once. Where have you been, and with whom have you been?"

"I have been on the banks of the water," she answered, slowly.

"With whom?" he cried, and his voice rang out full of anger and wrath.

"With Leon, father," she replied, and then a blank terrible silence fell over them. It seemed to the kindly mother that life itself must fall now that these two so dearly beloved were at variance.

"And you dare to tell me that!" cried the miller. "I forbade you to see him again—I forbade you to speak to him. I said that he was never to cross this threshold again, and yet you have spent more than two hours with him when you ought to have been at church. What have you to say for yourself?"

"That I could not help myself, father—that I did not go out to meet him; it was quite by accident. And you—you could not be cross with me if you knew. It seemed to me that the very gates of Heaven opened to me when I saw his face. He asked me to go down to Allan Water with him. I forgot everything in the wide world except the delight of being with him, and I went."

"She loves him so dearly, John," murmured the anxious mother; but the miller turned quickly to her.

"Do not interrupt me," he said, angrily. "I have a right to expect and extort obedience from my own child."

"I give it to you, father," she cried, "lovingly, willingly, in every instance except this. Do not stand between me and the sunshine of my life. Oh, father, father!" she cried, breaking into passionate tears and sobs, "kill me rather than take me from him."

"You have but to choose between him and me," said the miller. "Give up your lover or give up your father. There is no alternative."

"I cannot!" she cried, "for I love both. Oh, mother, speak for me—speak!"

"Do not interfere," said the miller, turning to his wife. "Let me manage this thing in my own fashion. *I repeat that she shall not marry this beggarly Frenchman!*" He turned almost fiercely to his daughter. "You disobeyed me, and you defy me. You shall not leave the house again until you are to be trusted! I forbid you to go to the meadows, or the woods, or the banks of Allan Water! You shall not leave the house again unless I give you permission! I thought I could have trusted you!"

The sound of her bitter, passionate sobbing, as she passed through the porch and went to her room, struck him with dismay.

There was no dinner on that day at the mill, no beautiful brooding Sabbath calm; no rest, no peace. The miller himself was too angry to remain in the house; he wandered to and fro in the meadows and the corn-fields; he cursed in his heart the young Frenchman who had brought this dark shadow over his once happy home.

How the next few days passed none could tell. Father and mother tried to distract their thoughts by hard work, while Lima wept herself ill with love, regret and pain.

She realized it now; there was no comparison between love of him and love of others, even the parents who had been so kind to her; she knew at last that she was ready and willing to give up all the world for him.

A week passed and she had never offered to go out-of-doors, nor had her father relented in his severity, and again there came a moonlight night when she heard the sound of oars beneath her window, and she knew her lover was there. There was no struggle this time with conscience or duty—love was lord of all; she went to the window and opened it. She saw plainly, by the light of the moon, her lover's boat underneath the window, and his face upraised to her. She told him all that had happened, and he was hotly indignant.

"It is persecution, tyranny, injustice!" he cried. "You belong to me, Lima, and not to any one else in the world. No one shall part us! As your father will not give his consent to our marriage, we will marry without it."

He prayed and he pleaded until she consented. It could not be just at present, for he must give notice at the church and at the registrar's office.

Not the church at Lynn, but at Haslingdene, some few miles distant, where neither his name or hers would excite much interest; and if they did so, if the worst happened, and the miller heard of it, they could find some other plan. The only thing was if she would consent.

She did not refuse; she told him quite frankly that if she must make a choice between her father and himself, that it must be him; and the words spoken under the solemn light of moon and stars were to her sacred as an oath.

He could not tell when he should come for her; a certain number of days must pass in order that all legal formalities might be complied with.

“I shall come some morning, love,” he said to her. “I shall come to your window here, as I have done to-night. It will be quite early in the morning, and a glow of golden light from the rising sun will lie on Allan Water. I shall throw up to the window here a great bunch of red roses, and when you see that signal you will know the hour has come. Then you will hasten out to me, and I will row you across the Allan Water. It will be so early that the birds will hardly have begun to sing—so early that the flowers will be still asleep. And then we will go to Haslingdene Church. When you leave that church you will be my wife, and nothing but death can part us.”

Oh, sweet, vain, empty words.

CHAPTER XIII.

THERE came a morning at the end of August, when quite in the early dawn Lima heard the soft splashing of the oars beneath her window—and she knew the hour had come—that this was her wedding-day, and that never again between herself and her lover would the shadow of parting fall. That day would give them to each other while they lived, and in the depths of her loving heart she blessed it.

She heard what seemed to her the music of the oars—then came the soft thud of the great bunch of roses at the window—her heart beat, and her face flushed—it was he!"

When she drew aside the hangings the picture that met her eyes was a most beautiful one—the sun was rising in all its pomp of rose, purple and gold, and a great glow of golden light lay over the broad, beautiful stretch of Allan Water; there was the boat just under her window, and there was her lover, his handsome face all bright with love raised to her. He stretched out his arm to her.

"Make haste, my love," he cried; "each moment that I wait for you here seems an hour."

She had written no letters, as most girls do who run away from home, she had left no farewell messages—it was all useless, she said to herself. Yet she did not leave her old home without passionate regret; but the love of youth is strong, and the passion of youth knows little control. She stopped for some few minutes outside the door of her mother's room—longing with the whole force of her heart to cry out that she was going—would they bless her and forgive her? She was going with her young lover, who was waiting for her on Allan Water, with whom she was about to begin a new, beautiful life, but which would lose half its beauty without them. The words rose in a burning torrent from her heart to her lips, but she stifled them there.

It would be of no use, If her father knew he would lock her in her rooms, and her lover must go away weary at heart again. She kissed the door of the room where those who loved her so well slept. Her feet lingered over the threshold of the dear old home. She saw herself a little fair-haired child, the very pride of the miller's heart; she could see herself growing a maiden, fair and tall, like the white lilies in the garden, even more beloved and more passionately worshipped than when she was a child, and now she was flying from them. Was what her father said true—that the young Frenchman's love had brought a curse upon their home? Could love ever bring a curse?

As she passed forever from the threshold—the safe shelter, the sure refuge of home—she thanked them in her heart for all that they had done for her, for the love, the patience, the self-denial.

"They will forgive me," she said, "when we are married, and Leon and I come home together—they will forgive us; they cannot refuse."

She opened the door that led from the porch to the garden, and such a rush of sunlight came in, such a burst of fragrance, it seemed to greet her like a blessing and an omen of good.

Leon rowed up to the green bank, and the next minute she was with him in the boat on Allan Water.

"Forever and forever!" he said solemnly, to her. "We shall part no more after to-day."

"Oh, Leon, I am so frightened," she cried, and her beautiful face grew pale in the rosy light. "I am sorely afraid."

"Courage, my darling, my beautifnl sweetheart, courage. 'It is only the first step that costs.' How good of you to come, and was ever wedding-day heralded by such a rosy dawn?"

But she shuddered violently.

"Oh, Leon," she said, "the wind is cold, and the water is cold. I am afraid."

"There is nothing to fear," he said. "See, I will row you over Allan Water as softly as a swan floats."

"It is not the water I fear. Oh, Leon, Leon, I am

doing wrong. I should not be here: I should not have left home."

"It is too late, my darling," he cried, with a victorious smile. "It is too late, my darling, to row you back again. Be happy, Lima, this is our wedding-day. Do not tremble, do not weep: the life that lies before you is as bright as the sky or the broad waters. Why should you fear? I am by your side, your lover, soon to be your husband. Hark! the birds are beginning to sing. Ours is a golden wedding-day, Lima."

He kissed the beautiful face and quivering lips. He talked to her until the color came back to her face and the smiles to her lips.

"It was natural, Leon, that I should feel leaving them, they have been so kind to me. They love me. They have never refused me anything until now."

"I will be kind to you, I will love you, I will never refuse you anything," he said, half jealously.

They were half-way across the water now, and Leon ceased rowing.

"Look round, Lima," he said. "Was ever anything so fair?"

The golden shafts of light were falling everywhere; the leaves stirred in the fresh morning breeze; there was a slight ripple on the surface of Allan Water; and the water-lilies seemed all at once to grow wide awake. She forgot her trouble in the fairy-like beauty of the scene around her. When they reached the green shore opposite to the mill, she could see the red roof and the blue pigeons flying.

"Good-bye to my dear old home," she said — "good-bye."

"You will have another home you will love better," said her lover, still half jealous of the love she was leaving behind her. "Now Lima, take your last look at it; when we turn down the high-road you will see it no more."

She stood looking at it for some time, then she held out her hand to him with a sudden, graceful gesture.

"Leon in the sight of my old home, which is a sanctu-

ary to me, promise me that you will always be true and faithful to me."

"I do promise. I could never be anything else," he said.

"Promise that you will always love me as you do now, better than any one else. Promise that your truth, your patience, your love and kindness shall never fail."

"I promise," he said; and then, with a long-drawn, bitter sigh, she turned away, and saw the old home no more.

* * * * *

The miller was down early that morning, it was so fine and fair, and there was so much work to be done. He said that he would go out at once, and return to breakfast in two or three hours.

As he passed by Allan Water, he saw that the boat had gone from the place where it was usually moored. He looked to see where it was, and saw that it was on the opposite side of the stream. He wondered who had taken it there, but no suspicion, however faint, of the truth occurred to him.

His wife had spoken a few words to him about Lima before he left the house. The miller fancied that he saw some slight improvement in her health and spirits. His wife thought just the contrary.

"I have had a strange feeling over her during the last few days," said Mrs. Derwent to her husband. "How I wish that either the young Frenchman had never come to this house, or that you could make up your mind to like him."

John Derwent turned round and looked at his wife.

"Do you mean to say," he cried, "that *you* like him?"

"I think I could like any one whom Lima loved."

"You would not like him long," said the miller. "Do not say that before her, or she will think you are on her side, and that will do her more harm than good; it will make her independent of me."

"I shall say nothing to her that you would not approve of, John; you may be quite sure of that," said Mrs. Derwent, but all the same her heart was full of loving, kindly

sympathy with her daughter. She would have done anything to have restored peace and harmony to those two whom she loved so well. The miller went to his work, and though he would not have owned it, his heart was hot and heavy within him when he thought of his beloved daughter.

The mother, too, went about her daily duties sadly and slowly, her heart yearning over the girl she knew to be in sore distress. She thought to herself that she would make her some nice tea: to women of Mrs. Derwent's stamp, a cup of tea is a salve for any evil that can befall human nature. She busied herself over it; she brought rich, sweet cream from the dairy — she prepared a little tray dainty enough for a queen.

She took it up stairs, thinking how the beautiful face would smile and brighten, but when she cried out "Lima, good-morning; I have brought you some tea," there was no answer.

She went into the room, and there was no Lima. At first she did not feel uneasy, did not suspect anything, but fancied her daughter had gone down without her knowing it. She carried the dainty little tray down-stairs again.

Then, with growing fear and growing sorrow, she began to search for her, but there was no Lima; neither in the house, the gardens, the orchard, the clover meadows, nor on the banks of Allan Water was there any Lima! And when the miller returned, two hours afterward, his wife met him at the threshold with a white, scared face.

"John, she said, "Lima is gone!"

"Gone," he repeated. "Gone where?"

He evidently did not understand.

"I cannot find her," said the trembling woman.

"Her room is empty, and she is nowhere to be found."

The miller's ruddy, comely face grew ghastly white.

"Do you mean," he said, "that she has run away?"

"I do not know," cried the unhappy mother. "Only Heaven knows. I cannot find her. Oh, John, I am afraid you have been to hard on her, and that she has gone away."

"If she has gone alone," said John Derwent, "I will find her, forgive her, and bring her back again, but if she has gone with him may the curse of the disobedient follow her and cling to her, her whole life long."

He did not heed the cry of distress that came from his wife, but went out of the house in search of her.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was long past noon when the miller returned, and then he was a changed man; he looked twenty years older; his face was haggard and worn; great lines were drawn round the lips and across the brow that had not been there yesterday; the ruddy, comely face was livid with passion and pain.

He walked into the kitchen, where his wife was busy; she looked up in alarm when she saw his face.

"Wife," he said, slowly, "go and bring me the Bible."

Wondering, afraid to ask any questions, afraid to linger, she hastened to obey him, and bringing the Bible, she placed it on the table before him. He turned over page after page of the written register; she heard him murmuring the names of the dead; she heard him murmur his own name—John Derwent, married to Helen Grey. Then he was silent for some few minutes. His face gave evidence of the terrible struggle in his soul.

"Listen," he said. "Lima Derwent, daughter of the above, born May 18th. You hear that, my wife?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Give me pen and ink," he said.

She gave it to him. He wrote a few words rapidly.

"Listen again," he said. "Lima Derwent, born May 18th, *died August 22d*. You hear?"

"Oh, Heaven!" cried the unhappy mother, "she is not dead, my beautiful Lima, surely she is not dead!"

"She is more than dead to me," said the miller. "If I had seen her eyes shut, and folded her hands in death, it would have been better for her—better for me. She

is more than dead. She has left us to marry the man whom I forbade her to see again."

"Married!" cried the mother, with some feeling of relief, "Lima married?"

"Yes, married; and dead to us for all time. She had to choose between us, and she has chosen. She has given us up—for him. We have loved her, cherished her, worked for her, and she has gone from us, with a smile on her face, without one word of farewell—think of that!—after all these years; gone, without a touch of her father's hand or a kiss on her mother's face! You need not cry so bitterly, wife; it has not hurt her. Do not let it hurt you."

"My only child!" cried the unhappy mother. "My dear and only child! Oh, John, I cannot bear it."

"You will have to bear it," he said, grimly. "She has left you no choice. She went away this morning, wife, while you and I slept—dreaming of her. John Dalton met her with her lover on the high-road to Haslingdene, and Mrs. Roberts, the postmistress at Haslingdene, saw them married. There is no error—no mistake; that is the child we have loved, reared, and cherished. A stranger came with a handsome face and a winning tongue—all the love and care of years are forgotten—he raises his hand, and she leaves us to go with him. You need not weep for her, if she can forget you so soon."

"Oh, John, you are so hard upon her!" cried the weeping mother.

"Hard upon her!" he said with grim irony. "You call me hard. I would have given her the last drop of blood in my heart, I would, indeed; but she will be child of mine no more!"

"You will forgive her—you must forgive her, John!" cried his wife.

"*I* forgive her!" said the miller, his face working with emotion. "*I*—no, never! While sun and moon shine, I shut my heart against her, forever and forever—it will hold her no more! And you, listen—for I shall never change—you must cast her out of your heart as I do out of mine. I forbid you to see her or speak to her. I forbid you to go near her. If you meet her, turn

away your head. If she cries out to you, be deaf and do not listen to her voice.

“ My only child ! ” wailed the unhappy mother ; “ how can I do it ? ”

“ It is not a question of how you can do it,” said the miller ; it must be done. We have been husband and wife for more than twenty years ; never an angry word has passed between us ; we have never had a hard thought of each other ; we have never quarrelled, and, my dear, we have been true to each other. On your love and your truth, I charge you to obey me.”

“ My only child ! ” she cried. “ Oh, John, do not be so hard upon me.”

His face darkened.

“ I have never said a rough word to you in my life,” he said ; “ but do not trifle with me ; do not try me too far. I will be obeyed. I told my daughter to choose between me and a man I hated — she chose him ; I will tell you, my wife, to choose between the child who has been false to us both—and me.”

She clung to him, weeping.

“ You, John,” she said, “ you against all the world, though it will break my heart.”

“ You promise to obey me implicitly,” he said. “ You will not see her, or speak to her ? ”

“ Not against your will,” she said ; “ but I pray Heaven to soften your heart to your only child.”

“ My only child forsook me for a stanger,” he cried, and there was exceeding bitterness in his voice. “ We are childless now, wife, childless — you and I.”

And the strong man broke down, sobbing like a child.

Then he told his wife all that he had heard ; busy neighbors had been to tell him ; no detail had been spared to him. They could tell him, now that it was too late, how, for many long weeks, the attention and interest of all the neighborhood had been aroused and centered in this love affair.

One had seen the lovers together quite early in the morning on Allan Water ; another had seen them in church ; another had witnessed the marriage ; a fourth

had seen them at Haslingdene Railway Station ; a fifth had always been sure that they would be married ; a sixth had heard what the young Frenchman had said. There was a chorus of sympathy and interest, but the general feeling was for the lovers and against the parents.

Never was a day more miserable than that at Allan Mill. The miller could not work ; the mill stood still. His wife could do nothing but weep. It was worse than loss by death, for there was no comfort in the desolation. A long weary day and a long weary night, when the mother could not rest in her room, but wandered about weeping and wailing, calling on the daughter she loved, and who had forsaken her—collecting with loving hands all that belonged to her, kissing the things that her hands had touched last—her simple, tender heart breaking with grief that she had lost her.

Then came morning light—the night had seemed endless. Where was she, the beautiful and beloved, who had slept last night under the safe shelter of the old home—where was she now?

Morning brought a letter, addressed to the miller, in Lima's own writing. It lay for some time on the table untouched. The miller's face had grown so dark when he saw it that his wife had not dared to speak of it.

Then suddenly he took it up and opened it. Surely, a more pathetic little letter was never penned, but it did not touch him.

She told him how she had struggled between love and duty ; how unhappy she had been ; how dearly she loved him ; but that love for her lover had been stronger than anything else, and she had given up everything to go with him, but not without pain. Ah ! no, a thousand times no, not without pain ! Her heart had ached at leaving the old home—at leaving them—but she could no longer bear life without her lover.

She was married, and her husband was so good to her, she loved him so much ; but the shadow to her sunshine, the clouds in her sky, the drawback to her otherwise perfect happiness, was—having left them.

“ If they would forgive her, if they would receive her

and her husband, if they would send a few words of loving pardon, she should be happy as woman never had been happy before."

The miller read on, his anger growing at every word.

"They were so happy — Leon had three days' holiday from the college, and he had taken such a lovely little cottage for her at Lynn ; he would get some pretty furniture, but home would be no home for her unless they came to it and forgave her."

A loving appeal that would have touched most men ; it only angered the miller more deeply.

"She will see what my answer is," he cried. "I told her to choose between *him* and *me* ; she chose *him* — now she must do without me."

He went out that morning and found the cottage taken at Lynn, then he hastened home, and collected everything that had been hers — the pictures, the books, the pretty furniture that he had bought with so much pride for her room, the piano—all her little ornaments, presents from him — her wardrobe, everything in this world that had ever belonged to her—the very toys that her mother had treasured from the time of her childhood, were sent to the cottage.

"I will keep nothing in the house belonging to her," he cried, in his anger, "nothing."

But the weeping mother concealed one thing that he in his haste and anger had forgotten — that was her portrait, painted by an artist who had stayed some time at Lynn. That the mother cautiously concealed.

"The time may come," she said to herself, "when he will notice it."

When that pretty room looking over Allan Water was dismantled and laid bare, it seemed to the miller and his wife as though some one lay dead there, and at last he vowed to himself that he would close it, and that while he lived it should never be opened again. Who can tell what the strong man suffered as he looked round the room ; he locked the door, and taking the key he flung it into the depths of Allan Water.

With all that he sent to the cottage there were but

these few lines: " You have made your choice and you must abide by it. May the curse of the disobedient follow you and cling to you so long as you shall live ! "

CHAPTER XV.

WINTER had come, crowned with snow and frost ; all the glories of the summer were things of the past. The flowers were dead, the birds had gone in search of sunlight, the winds were cold, the meadows brown and bare ; notwithstanding that winter has a charm of its own, a beauty peculiar to itself, there was a sense of desolation in the absence of sunshine and flowers.

Nowhere was this desolation felt more than at the mill ; the sunlight had gone from there even as it had gone from the landscape ; she who had been the light of the home was there no longer.

The great, broad sheet of Allan Water stretched out, darkling and drear, without the light of the sun on its surface, but nothing was so much changed as the interior of that house, which had once been the happiest home in England.

Not many months had passed since his daughter had left him, but already the miller's crisp, curly locks were turning gray, his ruddy, cheery face had grown pale, and the deep lines that pain had drawn there never lessened. He was a changed man. He went out to his work, but his manner was moody and silent ; no one ever heard him laugh or sing ; all his honest, cheery jests were ended. It was a broken-down, haggard man who brooded by the mill-stream and on the banks of Allan Water ; he had lost that which was dearer to him than life itself, and life held nothing for him which could in any way compensate for the loss. His neighbors talked about him, and said what a pity it was that he made such a trouble of his daughter's marriage. One or two, in kindly fashion, tried to speak to him about it, but he would never listen to one word ; he held up his hand with a

gesture for silence, a gesture which no one ever ventured to disobey.

At first those who knew both father and daughter would try to make peace between them, would speak to the miller of his beloved child — how beautiful she looked, and how happy she seemed ; no one ever ventured so to speak a second time.

After he had sent away everything belonging to her, had locked up her empty room and thrown the key into the depths of Allan Water, he never mentioned his daughter's name ; but he could not hide the ravages that pain and sorrow had made upon him. The mill had ceased to interest him ; the magnificent harvest that his fields had yielded, the corn stored in his granaries, the fruit that had filled his orchards, the ever-increasing account at the bank, gave him no pleasure. He had worked for his daughter all his life, but he would never so work again. Not one of the golden sovereigns he had hoarded with such loving care should ever go to enrich the Frenchman whom he hated with intense hatred, because he had stolen his daughter from him. Time had been when the miller was the cheeriest, the blithest, the happiest of men ; there was no trace of him in the sullen, brooding man whom people began to avoid, because they began to dread him.

His friends and neighbors thought him hard. After all, it was a love-match, and every one sympathizes with a love-match. Every one liked and admired the handsome young husband who had been so determined to win the miller's lovely daughter ; every one loved and admired the beautiful young wife who had given up everything to marry the man she loved ; and everyone hoped that in time the breach would be healed. It was useless to do or say anything — assuredly the miller's anger would wear itself out in time. Meanwhile the sympathy of the people was certainly with the young pair. The principal, of the college had been very angry over the marriage, and had half threatened that Leon de Saldana must find employment elsewhere. He had gone to Sweetbrier Cottage to say so, but the sight of that lovely young face disarmed him.

"You have done wrong," he said to Lima. "You have helped to mar your husband's whole career by marrying so young."

But she raised her lovely eyes to his.

"Do not be angry with me," she said; "we loved each other so much," and the principal being a kind-hearted man, was *not* angry. He made some little increase in the young count's salary, and recommended to him several private pupils from the town of Lynn.

So that during that first year there was no pressure of poverty at the pretty little cottage; nothing to mar the perfect beauty and perfect poetry of one of the sweetest love stories ever told.

No one could see the young husband and his wife together without warmest sympathy; they loved each other so dearly, were so entirely the whole world to each other.

It was only the old people who looked at each other so sadly, and said that it was too bright and too beautiful to last; only the old who knew, by most bitter experience, the strength and the worth of human love.

The little cottage, framed in flowers and foliage, was earthly Paradise, the prettiest little home in Lynn, even as its mistress was always and ever the Belle of Lynn; the simple dwellers in Lynn were proud of her, and fond of her; the only drawback to what otherwise would have been perfect happiness for Lima was the separation from her parents; but that could not last, she argued within herself; her father must yield, and *then*—then would come perfect bliss.

It had been a terrible trouble to her when, on reaching home, she read those lines written by her father. The words never left her mind:

"The curse of the disobedient."

To her infinite distress, Leon had laughed at them, said they were melodramatic, and seemed to ridicule them, until he saw how much they affected his wife.

"You do not know your English proverbs, my darling," said the young count. "There is one that runs in this fashion—'Curses, like chickens, come home to roost.'"

She looked at him with half-frightened eyes: that he

should speak lightly or think lightly of anything so terrible as her father's curse, seemed dreadful to her. She did not understand how light and mercurial is the French temperament, how laughter and tears lie close together in those laughter-loving natures.

"If that means that my father's curse would recoil upon himself, I would far rather that it fell upon me," she cried.

"The probability is, my darling, that it will not fall upon either, but will remain quite harmless, just as it is," said the young count, with a smile.

But she could not forget the words—they were always ringing through her heart and brain, and when she was alone she found herself continually wondering how they could come true.

"The curse of the disobedient!"

What curse could happen to her? A curse meant some terrible evil. What evil could possibly befall her? Nothing while she had the love of her husband; she could not know other evil than the loss of that. Poverty would be perhaps hard to bear, but by his side it would matter so little. Sickness would be bad, but nothing if he were at hand to console and comfort her.

She could imagine no evil that could befall her while she had her husband's love, and she could never lose that; nothing was safe on earth but that; as the stars were fixed in the heavens, as the seasons were fixed to time, as day followed night, as the sun rose and set, so fixed, so sure, so unchangeable, was her husband's love for her. Nothing could rob her of that, nothing could take it from her, no curse could touch it. While that was hers, she felt that she could defy the whole world.

Her happiness, her love, and her beauty grew with the days; never had husband been so devoted as hers; never love so true or so chivalrous—never girl so beloved. There was but the one cloud in her sky—her separation from her parents. At first, after her return home, she had made great efforts. She had written many times, but the letters had been returned unopened and unread.

Once, and this had been the hardest to bear, when she was walking in the streets of Lynn and in the distance

she saw her father. Her heart beat fast at the sight of the well-known figure and the changed but familiar face. She would have hastened to him, but he turned away—he would not meet her or look at her. Again, when she had wandered near the banks of Allan Water, she saw her mother crossing the clover meadows, and the girl's heart went out to her with a great passionate cry.

But her mother did not wait for her; perhaps the miller was in sight, perhaps she remembered too vividly his threats and menaces. She did not stop, but as she hurried back to Allan Mill, one heard on the soft summer wind the sound of a woman's bitter wailing and passionate sob.

A year had passed, the beautiful golden summer with its wealth of fruit and flowers had come again.

The tide of prosperity seemed to have set in at the little cottage. It was wonderful what an ardor for learning French had seized upon the inhabitants of Lynn.

The young teacher had more pupils than he could manage, and the lovely summer days, as they glided by, found him as busy as he was happy. He spent the evenings in the beautiful little garden, where Lima brought him coffee and cigarettes.

“I am the happiest of all the long line of the Soldanas,” he said to her one evening, when the sun was setting and the happy birds were singing themselves to sleep; “I am the happiest and most fortunate of all the Soldanas, although I have never worn a title or seen even the shadow of the home of my ancestors. I have a dear and beautiful wife who makes up for all.”

She looked at him with such an expression of delight on her face it was almost pitiful to see.

“Do I really make up to you for everything you have lost?” she asked.

He threw his arms around her and drew her to his heart; he kissed her with passionate affection.

“I declare,” he said, solemnly, “that I would rather have you for my wife, and have your love, than be the Emperor of France, or the richest man in the world!”

“You mean that, Leon?” she said, her lovely face all flushed with delight.

"Of course I mean it," he replied. "Why, Lima, I do more than mean it; if I had been reigning lord of the whole domain of Soldana—I would have given up all to have married you!"

He spoke the words and she listened to them; the time came when both remembered them with bitterness and pain.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THE course of true love never did run smooth," says the poet; but at Sweetbrier Cottage the course was smooth enough.

"I shall always live in hope," said the beautiful young wife. "I am sure the day will come when my father will find that he cannot do without me any longer, and will come in search of me, and then, Leon, I shall be the very happiest woman who has ever lived; and it will all come right, will it not, Leon?"

He answered, laughingly, "Yes," but he did not really care much about the matter, only so far as his beautiful young wife's happiness was concerned. The miller had never been particularly civil to him. He had hated him with relentless hatred from the moment he found out that he wanted his daughter. He cared very little whether the miller came near or not, and he wondered greatly that his wife should attach so much importance to it.

If the plain truth had been told, he preferred matters as they were. His beautiful Lima was more his own than if her time and attention had been divided between him and her parents.

There are few people in this life who can boast of one year of entire happiness. Lima did, and in the after years she could never remember the first warning of the shadow that was to fall.

He talked much to her of France, and of the ancient glories of his race. He liked to sit out with her in the cottage garden, near where the great sheaves of white lilies grew, and tell her all the stories of his ancestors: how they had fought in the Crusades, how they had

served king and country, how they had been worshipped by those who lived on their domain — they had done great deeds, of which all France had been proud.

“And now,” he added, as he watched the rays of the sunset on the white lilies, “now I am the last of what was once one of the most powerful families in France. When I die the name of Soldana will be extinct. If ever the history of our family is written, it will be told how I was born and lived and died in exile.”

“But you are not unhappy, because you have me,” she said, laying her loving arms round his neck.

“That is true, Lima,” he answered. “I would rather have you than all France put together.”

“Shall you never go back to France?” she asked, wistfully.

“I have never been there,” he replied. “I was born in England. No, I do not suppose that I shall ever see my beautiful France.”

“Could you not go there in disguise?” she asked. “Should you be discovered, what would be done to you?”

He laughed bitterly.

“I should be sent away, or put into prison,” he replied. “I am not quite sure which. My mother lives in France, hidden in some out-of-the-world nook. I wish she could see you, Lima. My poor, proud, loving mother! her very heart craves and yearns for me, yet I shall never see her! I cannot go to her, and she cannot leave France.”

“Is your mother proud?” she asked, wonderingly.

“I should think that she was the poorest and the proudest woman in the whole wide world. She looks upon me as a disinherited young prince, and herself as a kind of displaced queen,” he replied. “I think myself there is no pride so grim, so terrible, so unrelenting, as the pride of a person who has lost all that the world holds dear. I have thought at times that if my mother had been rich, and had her proper position in the world, she might have been an amiable woman.”

“Is she not amiable?” asked Lima; and her husband laughed.

"No, my darling. It is some years since I have seen her, and then she was as imperious as any empress."

In the after-years she remembered this conversation, and wondered why she had not thought more about this mother, so poor, so proud, so haughty.

As there are links in a chain, and each link is of paramount importance, so when she came to look back on her life, she found the links that, when connected, made the fatal chain.

The first link. She went into the pretty little parlor one summer afternoon when the room looked like a bower of roses, and found her husband sitting near the window with an engraving in his hand. He was studying it earnestly, his eyes riveted on the pictured face. He was so completely engrossed in contemplation that he did not hear her enter the room, and for the first time she came into his presence without any sign of delight or welcome from him, and for that reason she remembered it. She went up to him and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"What are you looking at, Leon?" she asked; and there was just a tinge of jealousy in the loving heart, that he should look so long and so lovingly at anything but herself.

He held out the picture to her.

"Do you know who it is?" he asked.

"The Emperor Napoleon," she cried. "Why, Leon, what are you looking at him for?"

"I am studying his face, Lima," he answered.

"His face," she cried again. "What for?"

"I am trying to find out what he is like; what qualities he has. Can you help me?"

"But why do you want to know that?" she asked, still wondering.

"It is a fancy of mine," he replied. "Now, Lima, look well at the emperor's face, and tell me what you think of it."

She took the picture from his hand, and held it where the light fell full upon it. She looked at it very earnestly.

"It is a noble face," she said, "but inscrutable. I cannot read it; and the first thing that strikes me is its profound sadness."

“Sadness!” he cried; then he went up to her, and threw his arms around her in a careless fashion, while he looked at the portrait with her.

“Yes,” he said, thoughtfully, “there is a great shadow on it; the eyes are sad, and the lips are sad. It is a good face, Lima; it is the face of a man to be trusted. Is it a kindly face?”

It might only be her fancy, but it seemed to her that he asked the question with bated breath.

“Yes, I should think so,” she replied. “It looks to me a very kindly face.”

Then he was silent for a few minutes.

“Lima,” he said, suddenly, “judging from his face, should you take the emperor to be a man who would do a generous deed?”

And this time she was not mistaken. He looked at her as he spoke with eager anxiety, and waited her answer in breathless suspense.

“Yes,” she replied; “judging from his face, I should say that the Emperor Napoleon is capable of most generous deeds. But why do you ask me? How strange that this fancy should come to you now, Leon.”

“No man is master of his own fancies,” said the young husband, lightly.

He took the picture from her hand, and wrapped it carefully in paper, and tied it with a string.

“Where did it come from?” asked Lima, with a sudden outburst of curiosity.

“I borrowed it from the principal’s room,” he replied; and the beautiful blue eyes opened more widely still.

“Did you really, Leon, borrow it—bring it all the way home on purpose to study it?” she asked.

“I did,” was the brief answer. Then he changed the subject altogether.

“Let us go down to Allan Water,” he said; “we need not go near the mill. I have a thirst and a fever on me to-night, which nothing but the sight of the clear, deep water and the foaming mill-stream will dispel.”

They watched the sun set over the shining water, and over the bonny green woods. Leon said little, but he seemed to be thinking deeply.

"I am afraid, my darling," he said, "that I am but a dull companion for you. The sight of the beautiful water has set me dreaming. How little I thought, when I first saw it, that on its green banks I should find the one dear love of my life."

"Dream, think, speak, do anything you will," she said, "only love me—love me always."

"It would be very difficult to do anything else," he said.

They walked through the dewy meadows home, but that night, when the moon shone in at the casement window, and fell on her husband's sleeping face, she saw something new and strange in the expression of it; and as she watched him she saw his lips move—he was talking in his sleep, but so gently that she could not distinguish the words he murmured, only that ever and anon he sighed, "La Belle France! La Belle France!" That was the first link in the long and fatal chain.

The second was, that it struck her one afternoon her husband *wished her to go out*. He had returned from the college earlier than usual, and almost the first desire he expressed was for something that it was impossible to get, unless she went to the town of Lynn. She did not feel inclined for a long, solatary walk, so she sent the little maid-servant, and she fancied, when she returned to the room, that he looked somewhat disappointed.

"I thought you would have gone yourself," he said, slowly.

"No, I am rather too tired for a walk to-day," she replied.

Then he asked for something else, and the finding of which would necessitate her absence for some time. She looked at him, half puzzled; as a rule, if she left the room while he was in it, he would ask her where she was going, why she could not remain? She could hardly realize that he wished to be alone. She rose, half sadly, to comply with his request; it was such a novelty for her to feel that she was in the way. She left him, and remained absent much longer than she need have done, hoping every moment to hear him call her in his eager voice, but there came no sound from the room where she had

left him. What could he be doing that he had so evidently desired her absence? Resting? Ah, no! he could never rest without her. Not feeling quite happy or light of heart, she wandered into the garden, listening every moment for the voice which after all, never sounded. She took a sudden resolution, she hastened back to the room and opened the door; he was busily engaged in writing, writing, with his face flushed and his eyes all aflame, so engrossed that he did not see her enter, did not seem to remember her, but threw sheet after sheet of closely written paper from his desk to the floor. She withdrew gently, and for some short time the world seemed empty and blank; it was the first time that he had forgotten her.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE next link in the chain was but a slight one, yet, in the after-years when she placed them together so as to form one great chain, it was not an unimportant one. When they were first married, such a thing as a letter or a newspaper never came near the house. The postman on his rounds would smile as he passed the garden gate, but he never left a letter there. Now they came in unusual numbers, but all from France. Some were large and weighty letters, some in great blue envelopes, others were smaller and thin.

One morning—it was just the beginning of September then, and the lovely autumn flowers were all in bloom—she went out to gather some fresh and sweet flowers for the breakfast-table, and when her hands were filled with the loveliest blooms, the postman appeared.

He gave her four letters, all from France, two large and heavy, two others smaller. She took them in with the flowers, and laid them by her husband's plate. How eagerly he raised them—how eagerly he tore open the envelopes and devoured the contents.

“Your letters are all in French, Leon!” she said.

“Yes; and all from France,” he replied; “they would not interest you; they all refer to the same business.”

"I thought you had nothing to do with France now," she said; and, quite unconsciously to herself, there was some little pique in her voice.

"I half believe," he said, "that you are jealous of *la belle France*."

"I am jealous of anything and everything that takes one of your thoughts from me," she said, "and I begin to think that *la belle France* takes many."

"Not one that ought to be yours," he said, gallantly; but she noticed after that morning how frequently he would walk out alone in the garden before breakfast and take the letters from the postman's hands.

He did not ask her to go out with him in the lovely autumn evenings; he did not care to see the sun set over the banks of Allan Water; he was always writing. Those hours which had been so precious and so few, and which had always been devoted to walking out with her, were now occupied entirely in writing.

So winter came, and if the young wife's face was not quite so bright, she was still as happy as it was possible to be. The chill winds were blowing; King Frost had taken possession of the whole country round; there was ice on the bosom of Allan Water; cold, yet as beautiful in its way as summer; and the winter brought with it Christmas, Christmas brought holidays for Leon de Soldana.

"Lima," he said, one morning, "is there any place where you would like to go for these holidays?" and she answered, "No, there is no place I love like home."

"Do you never wish for what people call change?" he asked.

"Change from *home and you!*" she cried. "Why, Leon, you are jesting."

He threw back his handsome head with a careless laugh, half impatient, half amused.

"I do not see any jest," he said; "I enjoy change."

She interrupted him eagerly.

"Do not say that, Leon. It is not true! I will not believe it! You do not love change. See how well you love Allan Water, and see how true you are to me."

"Still, I like change of air and scene," he said, "and I was merely offering to you what I like myself."

"But, Leon, why at Christmas? Christmas is a home festival: why should we go away?"

"We have a whole month before us," he said.

But his wife was anxious; it seemed to her that he was withholding something from her. She noticed that he spoke but little of what would happen after Christmas; that he never alluded to what they should do when the great festival came round. There were times when she fancied that he looked anxious. Surely he could not be keeping anything from her—there was nothing to keep; he could not have any money troubles; he had been so wonderfully successful in his teaching.

A new anxiety came to her. She fancied that he had something to say to her, and could not make up his mind to speak. They were talking one winter's evening, when the fire burned brightly and the lamps were lighted, speaking of one of the pupils of the college, who had died recently after a painful illness. Leon looked at his wife, whose beautiful face shone brightly in the fire-light.

"Lima," he said, "what is the greatest pain in the world, should you think?"

"The greatest and most bitter?" she asked.

"Yes—the one that hurts those who suffer from it most."

"I should think," she replied, "it is the pain of finding that you loved one who was unworthy of love."

"You are right," he said. "But do you think it often happens that people find out the beloved one is worthless? Love is blind, and does not see the faults of the beloved."

"I should say love sees every fault," she said, slowly, "but loves on, in spite of all. Leon," she added, suddenly, "if I saw in you every fault that man can have, I should love you in spite of them—it would not lessen or change my love."

He looked at her with laughter in his eyes.

"There is one fault you would never forgive in me," he said; "and that is, if I found any face fairer, any eyes brighter than your own."

"I should never forgive you if you loved any one

else," she said, gravely; "but that you will never do, Leon."

"Never, my darling," he said, kissing the beautiful young face.

Then it seemed as though the subject had a weird fascination for him.

"Lima," he said, "of course such a thing never could be; it is neither in the bounds of possibility nor probability—but suppose that I did forget you and care for some one else—what should you do?"

"I should die, Leon," she answered, gently.

"But no one can die when they like," he said.

"I do not think I should wait for death to come for me; I should seek it—but such a thing could never be, could it, Leon?"

"No, my darling—never," and every word of this kind that he spoke she gathered in her heart and she never forgot one.

Still the idea haunted her and pursued her that he had something to say to her.

"Lima," he would begin, then pause abruptly, and when she raised an expectant face to his he would ask some trivial question. At last she went up to him.

"Leon," she said, "I have a fancy over you."

He looked startled and conscious.

"Do not indulge it," he said. "We have agreed that fancies are all nonense."

"This is a grave one," she answered. "I am haunted by a conviction that you have something to say to me which you do not like saying—is it so?"

"You must be a witch, Lima. It is so. How did you find it out?"

"It is not very difficult to discover," she replied. "Now tell me what it is."

"I do not like telling you," he said. "I have deferred it from day to day, until I am ashamed of not having told you. It will pain you and hurt you, I know."

"What is it?" she asked, with quivering lips. "You frighten me, Leon."

"Nay, darling, there is nothing to fear. It is this

We have not been parted since our marriage, and now I find it absolutely imperative that I should go to France at Christmas."

"To France!" she said, and her face grew colorless. "But, Leon, you will take me with you — you could not leave me here?"

"Unfortunately, there is no alternative," he replied. "I would most gladly take you, but that is utterly impossible. I must seek some disguise myself. I could not take you."

"But why are you going?" she cried, in an agony of fear and misery. "Why need you go?"

"I must go on business that I can not explain to you now. Hereafter, when it is all over, I will tell you, but now you would not understand."

She went up to him and knelt down by his side.

"My darling," she said, "do not go. I have a foreboding, a terrible fear over this journey."

"I must go," he said, firmly; "there is no help for it."

She slid from his arms to the ground with a passionate cry, and she lay like a wounded bird. He tried to raise her and to cheer her. But the dawn of the tragedy had begun, and she seemed by instinct to know it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE twentieth of December came, a day that was always to be remembered in Lima's life, the day on which the young husband she loved so well was to leave her for the first time since their marriage. Since he had told her, the thought of this parting had been on her heart like a weight of lead; it was her one dread, the one idea that never left her. She could not realize to herself the time when he would be gone, what she should do, what would become of her; how she should fill the long hours. She had lived so entirely for him, that she could not understand what her life would be without him, and now the day had come when he was to leave her.

A cold, bright day: the snow on the ground was frozen hard, the hoar frost shone on the bare branches of the trees, on the hedges and the meadows. The ice lay thick on the bosom of Allan Water; perhaps the prettiest sight of all was the number of robin-reddbreasts flying about in the snow.

Neither sight nor sound could cheer the desolate heart of the young wife. In vain she had prayed and pleaded that either she might go with him, or that he would stay with her.

It seemed to her that the only important thing in this world was that they should be together. There was nothing of sufficient interest, in her estimation, to part them,

“I would not leave yon for a whole week to be made Queen of Spain,” she said.

“I shall not be made King of Spain,” he replied, laughingly, “and Lima, I would not go unless it was imperative.”

“I should feel so much easier and so much happier if I knew what you were going for,” she said.

“And that I will tell you when I return,” he replied.

He could not understand why he should feel this parting so acutely.

"I shall soon be back," he said to her frequently. "I shall only be away for a few weeks."

"But I shall have to live through every separate moment without you," she sighed.

Yet his heart was touched when he saw her packing his portmanteau. He was busy writing, and she had brought all that he would require into the room, solely and simply that she might have the happiness of looking at him while she was at work. He saw how lovingly she prepared everything; her fingers seemed to caress each different article belonging to him; more than once he saw her stoop down and kiss something before placing it in his portmanteau, and he thought to himself how much and how dearly she must love him; and then he seemed to understand better how she should miss him. That was the eve of his departure; he remembered every detail—how, more than once, she had thrown down her work and hastily crossed the room to go to him; how she had thrown her loving arms round his neck and kissed his face; how she had cried to him not to go, not to leave her, for she could not live without him.

And now the morning had come—shining, bright, clear and cold. Lima rose early, and her husband remembered for long afterward how the beautiful face lost its color, and the sweet lips quivered when she tried to smile. She made him some coffee and some toast, but she could not take anything herself.

"Leon," she said, "will you let me walk to the station with you?"

"Certainly, my darling, if you wish it," he replied.

"I do wish it. I could not bear to say good-bye to you here, where we have been so happy together. I should like my farewell to be associated with a strange place, not with home. I should not like to look around me every hour and say—'that is where I stood when he kissed me for the last time; that is where he said good-bye.' I could not bear it. I shall say 'good-bye' to you at the station, and I shall not see it again until you come home; then I shall go to meet you. When you have

gone away, every time I look at that chair where you are sitting now, I shall see you and go over again all that we have said, and I have thought, Leon," she added, her eyes filling with tears, "kiss me here; that will be a pleasant memory for me when I look at the little table with the flowering Christmas rose upon it. I shall say to myself, 'It was there he kissed me, and said that he would love me forever and ever.'"

"Of course I will," he said, hastening to her, and taking her in his arms. He kissed her face with passionate affection, but even as he did so he gave one glance at the clock, as though he felt anxious about the time.

"I do not think dying could be worse than this," Lima said to herself, as she put on her bonnet and cloak. "Leon," she cried, "do you know that I shall come back to this house and find it empty; do you know all that means for me?"

"It is only for a time, darling," he said, but her passion of grief affected him; his face grew white, and the hands which tried to soothe and caress her trembled.

They stood together at the threshold of the little home where they had been so happy; they gave one long lingering glance at the pretty porch, the snow-covered garden.

"I shall be back before the snow melts," said Leon, and they walked down the frosty road together.

Some who met her, as she walked home alone after her husband had started, hardly recognized her. Her face was white and set; it was more like the face of a dead than a living woman. The day passed for her in a trance of grief; she neither eat, drank, slept, nor rested, until at last the little maid grew alarmed, and asked if she should fetch any one.

Ah! if she could have had the comfort of the loving mother's kindly words — if she could have laid her head on some faithful, loving breast and wept out all her sorrow, it would have been well for her; but there was no one; her young husband had been all the world to her; she had not cared to make friends while she had him.

So that now, in her sorrow and desolation, she was more alone than any one else could have been.

She never forgot the first day ; the blank, chill desolation, the despair. The greatest pain was when her eyes gazed on anything that had belonged to him, that he had recently used, or that he had touched before his departure. "If every day is to be like this," she said to herself, in a passion of regret, "I shall not live until he comes back." There was no comfort anywhere.

A scene that had in it some pathos was passing at the mill that same afternoon. The miller came in from work rather earlier than usual. No longer the cheerful, genial, kindly man who had a kind word for every one, a smile and a jest, but a morose man brooding always over a hidden sorrow ; angry, disappointed in his best hopes.

He took his pipe and his book ; he did not notice that his wife continually threw at him imploring glances. She did not see anything in his face which gave her any help or hope. At last she spoke.

"Have you heard any news in Lynn to-day ?" she asked.

"No," he replied, briefly.

"I have," she said, tremblingly, but he did not ask her what it was, or invite her to continue the conversation. "I have heard some news, John," she continued, trembling violently, yet determined to succeed in making him listen to her. "News that seems to me so strange it has frightened me."

He would not ask her what it was, he would not seem to take any interest in it, but there was a nervous, almost excited expression in his eyes that told her what was coming.

"I went to Lynn this morning," she said. "Oh, John, do not be angry with me ; I wonder why I am so frightened to speak to you, so frightened that I tremble, and my breath comes in hot, thick gasps. I heard something that I must tell you, even if you should kill me for it."

"I am not very likely to kill you," he answered, grimly.

"I heard," she continued, "that the young Frenchman

has gone back to France, and that she — ,” she dare not say the name “Lima,” — “she is quite alone.”

The miller’s face grew livid, but he uttered no words.

“Quite alone, dear,” said the trembling woman, laying her hands on his shoulders, “and my heart aches for her, it yearns over her. It is drawn toward her as though some one pulled the strings. Oh, John — John, my heart’s love, my dear husband, let me go to her. They say he has gone for a holiday, that he will come back when Christmas is all over, but I do not know; my heart is heavy. Some one who saw her at the station told me that there never was so sorrowful a face, that no one ever shed more bitter tears, and I cannot bear to think that she is alone and desolate; let me go to her, John.”

He did not utter one word.

“I would not vex you, I would not tease you for the whole wide world, John,” pleaded the faithful creature, “but she is mine; I nursed her; she is my very own. Let me go to her?”

She clasped her hands round his neck. He unclasped them.

“I am not angry with you,” he said. “You are a woman and weak. Wait one moment.”

He crossed the room and took the big Bible from its shelf. He laid it open before her.

“Read that,” he said, sternly.

She read :

“Lima Derwent, born May 18th. Died August 22d.”

“You see that word ‘dead,’ ” he cried. “How can you ask me if you may go to see a person after whose name I have written the word ‘dead’? That is my answer.”

She fell into a passion of tears, she clung to him, and he put her away.

“You have my answer,” he said, “and if you leave the house on such an errand you never re-enter it.”

“You are hard and cruel,” she sobbed; “how can you be so hard?”

That answer would have been, had he spoken, because he loved her so much.

CHAPTER XIX.

A LADY—at that time the most beautiful, and with one exception the most powerful woman in Europe—sat alone in one of the most magnificent salons in the palace of Versailles—a lady whose diadem has been washed in tears, whose throne has been a terror, whose life has been the most romantic, the most brilliant, the most sorrowful ever known—whose loveliness, whose imperial grace was once the light of Europe—whose sadness and sorrow have been shared by all who know and revere her—Eugenie, the Empress of the French.

She was then in the pride of her wonderful beauty, wife of a man before whom the whole world bowed—empress of a proud, bright nation; adored by those who knew her, admired and esteemed even by those who did not; leader of the most gay and brilliant court in Europe—mother of the young heir who in those days was known to the people as *Dieu donne*, or “God given”—a lady of imperial grace and beauty, and of a kindly, gentle heart. She sat alone in the brilliant salon; the ladies of her suite were in attendance, but she had slowly wandered away from them, and stood at one of the large windows that looked over the splendid gardens of Versailles.

Her beautiful face was grave, her eyes full of shadows. Was it possible that some presentiment of the time when exile and sorrow, sickness and death, would take the place of royalty and magnificence; of the time when “Fair France” would be her home no more; when her imperial husband would find his sepulcher on the sea-washed shores of the country which had once been his home; when her son, the most gallant of young princes, would be slain in a foreign land?

There was no sign of these horrors coming then: the brilliant sun was shining, the skies were blue, the flowers all in bloom, the birds singing, the purple vines drooping

in great bunches, the golden oranges shone in the midst of green leaves, the fountains were playing, the whole world seemed to be laughing and bright.

Did she see in the far distance the shores of the land that was to be her home? Did she see herself discrowned and reviled? Did she wonder even then that the hands and the swords of all men were not raised to defend her?

A superb piece of cloth of gold, richly embroidered in violets, lay near her; she raised it, and sighed as her eyes fell on the violets; then one of her ladies came to her, saying that the person to whom she had promised an audience was waiting.

“I will see her here,” said the empress; and in a few minutes a stranger was ushered into the room—a lady, tall and stately, dressed in deep mourning, with a face that was most peculiar and striking; it could never have been beautiful, but it was aristocratic and intensely proud.

She bowed in graceful respect to the beautiful empress, who looked at her with kindly attention.

“You are Madame de Soldana?” she said, in a gentle voice.

“I am the most unhappy and most injured of women your imperial majesty;” was madame’s answer.

“You think it is in my power to help you,” said the empress. “Will you tell me how?”

“It lies within your majesty’s power to help me greatly,” said the suppliant. “With your majesty’s gracious permission, I will explain how.”

The empress slightly bent her beautiful head, then, thinking it would be better to speak, she added:

“I shall be pleased to listen to anything you have to say.”

Then Mme. de Soldana began her story—gently at first, but as the memory of her wrongs came before her, she grew excited and animated. Then it became a magnificent piece of declamation, one that on the stage would literally have brought down the house. Her proud face quivered with emotion, her fierce eyes literally flashed fire. She told what the Soldanas had been, of their ancient honor and glories, of their brave deeds; how they had fought in the Crusades, and on the battle-fields

of France; of their honor, courage, and renown. She told of the wealth that had been theirs, of the beauty of the Château de Soldana, the grand domain of Belle d'Or; of the large revenue that had been theirs; how they were on the full tide of prosperity, and suddenly the sky darkened and a tempest raged over the land, one of those terrible waves of revolution that seem to touch no other land, swept over France.

Everything was overthrown; amongst hundreds of other noble and wealthy families whose estates were confiscated, and who were driven into exile, were the Soldanas; why it was so does not matter to this story. They were driven ruthlessly from the country, forbidden to return under pain of imprisonment, sent penniless into a strange land. Mme. la Comtesse told the whole story; how they had struggled through long years of most bitter poverty; how she, forbidden as she was to enter the kingdom, had returned in disguise, for she would far rather have died than have lived on in that state; and how her only son — Leon de Soldana — was living in an English country town getting his living by teaching French. And he was graceful, handsome, clever, brave, gallant as a young prince; and he, with all the gifts and graces of his family upon him, with a heart full of passionate pride and ambition, longing to serve France, longing to live as his ancestors had done before him — there he was eating his heart away in the far-off English town.

Then madame's fine, fierce declamation died away and tears of emotion rained down her face. In the eyes of the empress tears were shining too. Did she see a time when a brave and gallant young prince should live in exile while his heart was consumed with a passionate desire to serve France?

"And I," she said, gently, "what can I do for you, Madame de Soldana?"

"Your majesty could do everything," she replied. "It was well known that when my Leon's grandfather was banished from France, he had done no wrong — it was party persecution. A petition was made to King Louis Philippe to restore the estate of which he had been

so unjustly deprived: but from reasons I know not of, that petition failed. Once more," continued the madame, "the friends of my family have taken up what seems to be almost a lost cause. Once more a petition is to be laid before the emperor, begging that, in his justice and his generosity, he will restore to the ancient family of the De Soldanas the estates that were so unjustly taken from them.

"I am delighted to hear it," said the empress, kindly.

"Ah! your majesty," cried madam, "it will rest with you! It is for that I am here."

"How can it rest with me?" said the empress. "I will do anything that lies in my power."

The dark, proud eyes were fixed on that beautiful face.

"Forgive me, your majesty," she continued, "if I presume; but they say here in France that — that your majesty has great influence with the emperor. Will your majesty use it for me? — for my son? — for the last of a grand old race pining in exile? You will speak for me?"

The empress smiled.

"If you think it will be of any use, I will do so with pleasure, madam," she said. "But are not these matters generally left to the ministers of the emperor?"

"I believe they are, your majesty," replied the quick-witted woman, "and that is why they so frequently fail. I have travelled far to lay my petition before your majesty. A few words from you will make it safe—quite safe."

"I will speak those words," said the empress, kindly, "and I will add to them what I think will be useful."

"I pray Heaven to bless your majesty, and send you prosperity to the end of your days!" cried Mme. de Soldana.

With the tact and kindness always to be observed in her, the empress asked many questions about this son. It was a topic she enjoyed and the greatful, happy mother was only too well pleased to speak of him.

"If my son should return to France," said Mme. de Soldana, "your majesty will have no more faithful subject."

"I need them," said the beautiful empress, with a

smile. "Of course, madame," she continued, "as your son is so young, he is not married?"

Mme. de Soldana answered:

"No, your majesty, he is not married."

A few more kindly words, and the proudest woman in France passed from the presence of the most beautiful and gentle.

The empress remained alone for some few minutes, thinking of the widow's son who was in exile, her heart warm with love of her own boy, who bore his father's name; and then she rejoined the little group of ladies. She spoke to them of the Soldana family. They were enthusiastic in their favor. "A noble family," "A grand old race," "Every one would be glad to see them restored;" and the empress began to think in what words she should best influence her imperial husband.

While Mme. de Soldana, her proud face flushed with emotion, hastened to where she could be alone.

"Oh, Heaven," she cried, with upraised face and upraised hands, "give back to us our rights—that which wicked men have stolen from us—give back to us our rights. I dare not think of it," she cried to herself—"to see my son at Soldana, at Belle d'Or. My son, than whom no prince is more brave and true. My son—my son—Comte de Soldana. Then, by the mercy of Heaven, he will not be the last of the Soldanas; the old race will live on." Such fierce exultation, such triumph, were never surely seen on any human face. My son shall marry the noblest lady in the land, he shall reach higher than any Soldana before him has done. My son! My son!"

Then she tried to calm her vehement emotion. It could not be just yet—she must wait some short time, at least. So great a work could not be done in a day, but she had the empress' promise, and on that she would rest her heart—rest her heart.

CHAPTER XX.

IN those days fair France knew many vicissitudes. The emperor was just and generous, when it was possible to do so, nothing pleased him more than to set a wrong right, to restore to friends, home and country those who had been unjustly deprived of all. In many instances he had granted the petitions laid before him; he had restored from exile and relieved from poverty the heads of many noble houses; still, the friends of the Soldanas felt great anxiety before the affair was laid before his majesty. He might refuse; he might say there had been too many restorations, and that some amongst those to whom he had given honor and wealth had not been his friends; he might say that he had done enough; he might, if he so chose, bring forward a hundred reasons why that particular petition should not be granted, so that they hesitated and were anxious; hence the number of letters that went to Sweetbrier Cottage. Sometimes they were full of hope, and repeated something the emperor had said which augured well for their suite; again, there was bad news, something had been said which dampened their hopes. Leon suffered terribly during that time; he would not say one word to his beautiful young wife about the matter then; if it were all a disappointment, if it ended in nothing, then she would not suffer what he had suffered — tortures of suspense; if it ended well and happily, so much the better for him; he should have the delight of surprising her, the pleasure of witnessing her surprise.

And what would the angry miller say then, when his daughter would be known as the Countess de Soldana?

“But I shall forgive him,” said the young heir to himself. “I shall forgive him. If all my day-dreams come true, and the petition is granted, I may even invite him to Belle d’Or, and show him that Frenchmen know how to live as well as Englishmen.”

But no word did he say to Lima. He did not want to

shadow her face with the great deep thoughts that surged through his own heart. He did not want her to go through the fears and hopes that never left him. Time enough to tell her when he should know for certain himself.

Then came a hurried letter from his mother, bidding him hasten to Paris, for she herself was about to solicit an interview with the empress, and it was as well that he should be at hand. From that interview Mme. de Soldana came flushed with triumph — she felt sure of success.

The empress was interested, the battle was won. She would have been more delighted still had she known what took place between the illustrious pair. The empress lost no time in redeeming her promise ; she watched the face of her royal husband to see when would be the most auspicious time. When she saw his face thoughtful and grave, she knew the subject would be inopportune. But there came a day when the emperor sought the empress in her own boudoir, to show her some superb photographs that had just arrived from England. He lingered in that magnificent room. If ever man could forget the cares of state, the weight of an empire, the burden of a crown, in looking at a beautiful face, he must have forgotten it in looking at hers. There was a smile on his lips and in his eyes.

Just at the moment when the empress was about to present her petition, the Prince Imperial entered the room. He had come to ask some favor of his mother, the empress. The boy would have withdrawn when he saw that his imperial parents were talking, but the emperor, who had a passionate love for his son, bade him enter.

Then followed one of those happy intervals that come at times even in the troubled lives of sovereigns. Father, mother, and child talked together as though there were no state affairs, no "tears on the diadem." The boy's bright face and quick, clear speech delighted the emperor.

The three so soon to be parted ; the thoughtful, noble father ; the beautiful, gracious mother ; the bright, clever

child ; the shadow of exile and death hung over them, but they were quite unconscious of it.

When the Prince Imperial had made his request and the empress had granted it, the boy withdrew. The emperor looked after him with eyes that were full of love and pride.

“ If anything happened to him,” said the empress, “ how it would overshadow our lives.”

“ Nothing will happen to him, I trust,” said the emperor ; “ he is the hope of France.”

“ Every house has its hope,” said the empress gently. “ Sire, I know another mother, who, like me, has one son, the last of his race, the only hope of a noble house, and he is in exile—a son, perhaps, like ours.”

“ She has been to me, this noble unhappy woman, and asked me to plead with you, sire, that when the petition for his restoration is presented, you will take a merciful view of it.

“ She made me—I cannot tell why—think of myself ; and her son—I know not why—makes me think of my son.”

“ I hardly see the comparison,” said the emperor, with a smile. “ You are the most beautiful empress in Europe, and our son is the Prince Imperial of France.”

“ I cannot tell,” said the empress, half sadly, “ why it is so. I should feel happy and relieved if you could restore this widow and her son to their rights.”

The emperor did not see then the time so soon coming when the beautiful imperial woman who shared his dignities would be a widow and an exile, and the son whom he loved with pride and tenderness be slain by a mean foe in a distant land ; no faint shadow of such a future ever came to him, yet he, like the empress, felt a strange attraction to the widowed mother and exiled son.

“ Of course the boy is young ?” said the emperor.

“ Nearly twenty, I understand,” replied the empress.

“ And not married yet ?” continued the emperor.

The empress smiled as she remembered madame’s face when she asked the question.

“ Certainly—not married,” she replied. “ You will think favorably of it, sire ?”

"I will not forget when the petition comes before me on which side your wishes lie," he said, gallantly, and then the beautiful empress knew that her cause was won.

In the small *salon* of a small house in the Rue de Sevres, mother and son sat together, talking eagerly. The face of Mme. de Soldana was wonderful to see—so proud, so determined, yet so terribly worn and anxious. She could not rest. She sat down, then rising hastily, pushed the chair impatiently away, walking with quick footsteps up and down the room.

"To-morrow, to-morrow; think of it, Leon. How shall I wait, how shall I live?"

"You *must* control yourself, mother," said the young count. "You will make yourself ill."

"I cannot," she said. "Only think of it, Leon. I have lived in poverty all my life, and in exile during the greater part of it, and now the gates of Paradise are opening to me; I, who have never had a roof of my own; I, who have never lived in anything but the smallest and cheapest of cottages, may soon be mistress of the château, or of Belle d'Or."

When his mother uttered those words, Leon suddenly remembered the beautiful young wife at home, she who had called herself Lima of the lime trees; surely she would be mistress of his home, and not his mother.

He looked up at her in such quick, vivid surprise, that madame paused in her rapid walk.

"What my son?" she asked; but suddenly there came in his mind a conviction of how much pain it would give her, how completely it would spoil her triumph, supposing that triumph to be won. No he would not tell her just yet that his wife, not his *mother*, should be mistress of his home.

If there were no triumph, if he must return to his teaching, and she go back to her abode, then there would be no need to tell her, it would but add to her pain. Already he had begun to perceive that between a woman of his mother's class—proud, patrician and imperial—and his beautiful young Lima, there was a difference and a distance that nothing could bridge.

He saw it with dismay that no words could express:

but just at this juncture there was no time even for thinking of it. He must arrange everything after the great event; everything must give way to it.

"Oh, Leon, Leon!" cried madame, with flaming eyes, "only think if I have my title, Madame la Comtesse de Soldana. I have lived for it, prayed for it, shed bitter tears for it; my heart has been consumed with passionate longing for it, and now the cup is at my lips. Oh, Heaven, most merciful, grant that it may not be dashed away!"

She grew calmer after a few minutes. Going to her son, she laid her hands on his shoulders.

"Leon," she said, gravely, "if we were to lose now, it would kill me. I should die."

He was almost afraid of her, this bright, princely young man; afraid of her proud face, that seemed to have nothing in it but pride; of her eyes, that flashed fire; of her intense passionate determination; of her fearless manner.

"She is like the English Queen Elizabeth," he said to himself. He had not been long with her before he felt that her nature was prouder, more resolute, more determined, more obstinate than his own—before he felt that she was gaining an ascendancy over him, and that once gained, it could never be lost.

"To-morrow brings life or death to me," said madame. "To-morrow I shall either remain the poverty-stricken homeless exile that I am now, or shall I be Madame la Comtesse de Soldana. Oh, Leon, and you can look composed!"

"I am not composed, mother," he answered, gently. "I feel it just as much as you do; it means as much to me, but I must meet the blow if it falls."

"I could not, I could not," cried madame. "I shall die mad if he refuses, but Heaven would not be so cruel as to give us this gleam, this shining gleam, of magnificent hope and then take it from us. Heaven itself could not be so cruel, Leon. Tell me what you think. Do you feel that we shall be restored to our own again, or not?"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE petition laid before the emperor for the restoration of Leon Comte de Soldana to his country, his estate, his revenues, was well supported. Most of the ministers signed it; they were always pleased when their royal master performed an act of munificence, which, while it added to his dignity and honor, did not detract from their gains. Many of the heads of the old royalist families had signed it, together with some of the most eminent men in France, and the emperor thought deeply over it.

He had but to say the word, and the Château de Soldana, Bell d'Or, and the L'Hotel d'Or, with their rich revenues, would be given back to the heir; from a poor exile he would become a rich nobleman and a friend to the empire, and the emperor was wise enough to know that it was not possible to have too many friends.

He thought and pondered over the matter for some little time.

There seemed to be no reason why he should refuse. Evidently the man who was banished had done nothing more criminal than offend against the prejudices of the then existing government. It was only just that what had been taken from him should be given back to his heirs and successors.

An emperor's nod—an emperor's "Yes!" How much depended on it! If the emperor could have seen behind the scenes—if he could have beheld the handsome and gallant young count, his face pallid with emotion, his eyes shadowed with anxiety, or the proud, imperious woman, whose suspense was like a flame, burning her heart and soul away, he would have been touched. He decided, after having most carefully discussed the matter, that he would grant the petition; that the young lord of Soldana should be restored to his country, his titles, his estates, and his revenues; that he should be received at court with all proper dignity and respect. The ministers

highly applauded his decision. The emperor felt that he had done a just and generous deed. He hastened to tell the empress, who was as pleased as himself.

"You will have the widow and her son, the young count, at court soon," he said, "and you must be extra kind to them, to atone, as far as possible, for all they have suffered."

"The young count will be quite a protégé of mine," said the beautiful empress, and in her heart she resolved to bring him forward as much as was possible.

The morrow had dawned for the two who waited in such a dire agony of suspense. Madame's face was white and drawn as pain and age could never have drawn it.

"To-day, to-day!" she hissed rather than spoke — "to-day brings life or death!"

They knew that the petition was to be presented at noon, when the emperor was in the audience-chamber, and noon had long passed.

"Mother," cried Leon, "let us go out! Let us go into the street—into the fresh air—anywhere! I cannot bear this room—I am stifled!"

"So am I!" cried madame; "but I will not leave! If there be any message it will be sent here, and I should not like to be absent."

Two more weary hours, still no messenger. Madame's face had grown ghastly during this terrible watch; then, at last, the messenger came.

"The emperor has granted the petition, praying that the Count de Soldana might return to France and take possession of that which should have been his father's inheritance."

There were numberless legal formalities to be carried out; but they do not belong to the story. The one great fact remained, the Count de Soldana held his own, never to lose it again.

Madame gave one cry. She was a woman of iron nerves and iron will, but when she heard that message she fell, for the first and only time in her life, into a dead swoon.

When she recovered she was lying on a hard couch in

the humble little salon, and her son knelt weeping by her side.

"Is it true?" she whispered—"true that we have gained all?"

"All, mother," he said. "The emperor has been most kind. I wish that it had happened while my father lived."

"So do I," she said; "but Leon, you, my son, will do for me all that he would have done. I have longed so eagerly all my life for power and pleasure and rule. Now all can be mine. I did not think I cared so much. See, Leon how my hands tremble, and I cannot see; there is a great mist over my eyes. It has shaken me terribly, yet I stand in my own right at last."

It was strange that, in spite of her devotion to her son, of her motherly instinct, her first thought now was for herself. She thought more of the fact that she was to be mistress of Belle d'Or than that he would be master. She thought more of the fact that she was to be wealthy and powerful than that he was to be the same. Perhaps long, grinding years of poverty and exile had something to do with it.

"You must try and quiet yourself, mother," said the young count. "You will have a fever if you are not more careful."

"I am well now, Leon," she said. "It was the suspense that tried me."

He was very gentle, very kindly with her, but all the time he knelt by her side he was thinking of his wife. What news for her—Lima, Countess de Soldana—why, it was like a romance, and what a beautiful, what a peerless countess she would make. It was said that some of the most beautiful women in Europe were to be found in the court of the Tuilleries, but she would outshine them all. He must not tell her just yet, not until everything was settled and arranged with his mother. The eventful day closed at last, but not before Madame la Comtesse had written a letter of most grateful thanks to the beautiful and gentle empress.

Long days and weeks passed. The young count wrote to the principal of the college, saying that most import-

ant business detained him in France, and he should not be able to return to resume his teaching at the college, but he did not say what the business was.

He wrote often to his wife, always the same things: he had important business on hand, which he could not leave, but he would hasten back to her as soon as possible.

He said no word to her, either, of what his business was; he intended when all was settled and arranged to return and bring her back to France — then for the glorious surprise, and the delight of seeing Lima a countess.

He sent her money, not too much, unless her suspicions should be aroused, but enough to keep her in comfort, if not more. She wondered greatly over it, but all the same was glad to receive it.

The day came—it was spring then, and the lovely land of France was half buried in sweet blue violets—when mother and son took possession of the grand old château of the Soldanas; a magnificent building full of historical interest and natural beauties; their reception was a quiet one, but the people were none the less pleased to see the old race restored.

Madame la Comtesse was a changed woman. She had never been beautiful, but youth and happiness had come back to her. Her proud face was softened, her manner was more gracious and tender.

There at the château her son seemed to take his right place, although his delight in seeing her rule was so great to him that he never in the least degree interfered with it.

He could hardly realize to himself how completely in a few days, even, he had fallen into the habits of *le grand seigneur*. He might have lived at the château all his life, he fell so soon into the ways and fashions of it. There had been no grand public reception when the young count and his mother took possession of their own; but as soon as they had settled their visitors flocked in, all full of congratulations; delighted to see the Soldanas back once more on their own territory, delighted to welcome in their midst the stately, patrician lady, who, if she were not beautiful, had a statuesque grace of her own even more imposing than beauty, and the young

heir who was handsome and gallant as a young prince. Every one who saw him—men, women, and children—loved him; his handsome, open face, his bright eyes and fair hair, his stalwart figure, that with the strength of a soldier united the ease and grace of a prince; every one loved him, women and children trusted him, he very soon became a popular favorite. He took back with him to that fair land of France all the good results of English training. He liked all athletic sports; he could ride as few men could; he was a sure marksman, an expert angler, and though he was younger than most of his neighbors, they looked up to him with a degree of respect and deference that was at least unusual. The ladies admired him even more enthusiastically; his fair frank face won them completely.

They said that in features he resembled Henry IV. of France. His mother rejoiced in the comeliness and grand physical beauty of her son.

Comte de Soldana had wished at first to go to Paris, but his mother objected. She seemed to retain some fear of the great city, where its rulers could take a fortune from a man and send him penniless from country and home.

"We shall be safer in Belle d'Or, Leon," she said, with a shudder, "much safer. People will not think so much about us if we live at Belle d'Or quietly for a time. If we are prominent objects in Parisian society, who can tell what may happen?"

And though he laughed at her fears, he felt that they were real, and respected them.

So to please his mother, whom he feared as well as loved, the young count consented to remain some time at Belle d'Or.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE beautiful château of Belle d'Or was so called from the profusion of yellow flowers that grew around and near it. From the green landscape around, it shone out almost like a golden plantation. In the early spring there were thousands of graceful daffodils and lenton lilies, yellow crocuses, tulips of every shade, from palest to richest amber, Gloire de Dijon roses whose heads seemed heavy with their own beauty, golden amaranths and asphodel. It seemed as though every yellow flower that blossomed and bloomed found a home there.

It had been the tradition of the house for many generations that golden-hued flowers should be cultivated at Belle d'Or, and there was no more beautiful sight in the wide world than to see the golden gleam of flowers everywhere, when the sun shone on them, bringing out all their brightness and sweetness. In all fair France there was no fairer home than this of the Soldanas. The château itself was a large, picturesque building, all of white stone, with the towers and turrets peculiar to the architecture of French châteaus. It was embowered in trees: a magnificent orangery added to its attractions, a beautiful river added to its beauty.

The interior of the château was magnificent. All that was of value—the pictures, statues, works of art, the buhl, the marquetry, the vases of jasper and onyx—were all just as the count who had died in exile left them. The young count, Leon, refurnished the whole place with the utmost luxury and magnificence. His mother was enchanted; her boudoir was hung with superb amber velvet, and everything to match. There was no more beautiful or luxurious room, even in the royal palaces of the Tuilleries or Versailles than this, and the delight of Madame la Comtesse when she saw it was great indeed.

“It is my dream realized,” she said to her son, with a sigh of unutterable content; and he thought to himself

that he could not tell her just then how brief her reign must be; she was so unutterably happy, and he knew that when her rule ceased, her happiness would end with it.

He knew also that he was a coward in delaying to tell his proud patrician mother that he was married to an English girl of lowly birth. He would have headed a regiment and would have dashed, sword in hand, through the serried ranks of the foe; he knew no fear, but he shrank from looking in that proud, statuesque face and telling her that he was married. Let her be happy in her own fashion for a short time! Then he would bring his beautiful English wife home; but he never deceived himself; he never said to himself that his mother would in time love his wife—he knew already that could never be: the nature of both differed so essentially, it could never be.

He looked at her sometimes, wondering in what words he should tell her—wondering almost that he ever dared to marry, realizing at last how grave and serious was the step he had taken.

He had not given one thought to its graver aspect. He had fallen madly in love after the fashion of the Soldanas. He had married the girl he loved, and thought no more about it. Now the consequences of that marriage looked him in the face. He did think once or twice that if he had known of what was to happen, he would have deferred his marriage—not that he loved Lima less, but that he could see so plainly that what was fitting for the poor French refugee, the poor teacher, was out of place with the lord of Belle d'Or.

Still he thought with love and longing of his beautiful young wife. He satisfied his heart and his conscience by writing to her continually, by sending her money, by sending her little presents, always saying that he was hurrying over his business and would return as soon as it ended. He bade her be of good cheer and keep a light heart, for he should be home soon, and then they would never be parted more.

She waited for him in sorrow and tears, while his life

was so full of excitement, of gayety, and pleasure, he hardly knew how the days passed—they seemed to fly.

As time wore on the fears of Madame la Comtesse began to abate. At first every unusual sound startled her. She confessed long afterward to Leon that she had never for many long weeks been free from the haunting dread that some messenger would come armed with authority to dispossess them again. She could not realize that they were living in perfect and absolute security, and that exile and poverty could touch them never more. She told him afterward what she had suffered, but she spoke no word at the time.

After a few weeks they were both quiet at home, and the black, bitter past was forgotten.

Madame la Comtesse gave a grand fête, which established her popularity forever, and the young count watched his mother in wonder. She had spent the greater part of her life in exile, and amongst poor people, yet, through hereditary instinct, she had the manner of a queen. Her grace, her courtesy, were something wonderful.

“Poor mother!” sighed the young count to himself; “how she must have suffered all these years; she is essentially one of those women born to rule; she finds her home and her happiness in society.”

Madame la Comtesse made a great impression on her guests that evening; her tall, stately figure was draped in richest amber velvet, shaded by finest point lace, and she wore a parure of magnificent diamonds.

She looked, moved, and spoke like a queen; her gestures were superb; her voice was low and clear as a bell; her intonation marvellously clear and refined; her face, though not beautiful, had the dignified repose that goes always with statuesque features. Her son watched her, with infinite pride and tenderness; the poor mother, with all these fine, high-bred instincts hidden in her heart all these years; with more fear and dread than ever, he thought of the time when the miller’s lovely daughter must take the place of his queenly mother.

This was the first of a brilliant series of fêtes given at Belle d’Or; then return fêtes were given, and for a few

weeks Madame la Comtesse and her son lived in the very atmosphere of gayety, luxury, and magnificence.

"Mother," said the young count one morning, "you seem to have grown younger and handsomer. I could not have believed that any one could change so much."

Madame looked at him, her proud eyes filled with tears.

"Leon," she said, gently, "I did not know that any one could be so happy; I did not know what life held; I did not know that so much brightness could come into the life of one person. I am old in years, but I am young in happiness, I have had so little."

"Old in years!" he cried. "Nay, mother, that cannot be: you have not one gray hair, and the deep lines are dying away. Another month at Belle d'Or and you will not have one left. Why, mother, how old are you?"

She looked at him with a smile that was at once sweet and shy.

"I was married so young," she replied. "I was only seventeen."

"And I shall be twenty next month," he said. "Then you are thirty-eight. Why, that is young enough for anything. You have a long life of enjoyment before you."

"I regret the many years I have lost," she said. "If I had been mistress of Belle d'Or at seventeen how I should have enjoyed it. My good fortune has come almost twenty years too late."

"Better late than never," he replied, gayly. "I will tell you what you must do, mother, to make up for lost time. You must contrive to get two years' enjoyment and happiness crowded into one."

Madame smiled.

"I will do my best," she said.

Then came to Madame la Comtesse the greatest, keenest delight of her life, being neither more nor less than an invitation from the emperor and empress to spend three days at Compiègne. She trembled with delight as she read it, and passed it to her son.

"They have not forgotten us," she said.

Then she looked at him thoughtfully.

"Leon," she said, "I hope the emperor will like you."

"I hope so, too, mother," he said, brightly.

"I hope you will do your best to please both emperor and empress," she added. "I have my views for you—for your future, I mean. I have mapped out such a future for you, my son, as will make you one of the first men in France, if you will follow the lines laid down."

"I will do anything to please you, mother," he said.

But he was ill at ease.

"The whole honor and fortune and glory of the Soldanas rest on your shoulders," she said, gravely. "It depends entirely on you whether what was once the most noble of the many noble families in France falls into obscurity, or whether it finds a place again in the foremost ranks."

"I know it," he said, quietly.

"And you are prepared to meet the responsibility?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered.

"You will let me advise, if not guide you, for the next two or three years, Leon?" said madame

"I will mother," he replied.

"It seems to me," she continued, hurriedly, "that this is too bright, too beautiful to last. If anything were needed to make me perfectly happy, it was this invitation from the empress. And oh, Leon, how I do hope that there at Compiègne we may meet some fair young girl who will make a good wife for you!"

He had opened his lips to say, "Mother, I am married;" but looking at her wistful face, he said to himself that he would not spoil this, her first visit to court. He would wait until she returned.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THREE bright, beautiful days that madame enjoyed to her heart's content. Nothing could have been kinder than the reception accorded to mother and son by the emperor and empress. The young count was most popular. His mother said to herself, proudly and fondly, that he was a born courtier. The emperor, who knew well what the life of an exile in England was, delighted in talking to him of it. It was no unusual thing for the emperor to walk out with the young count while they discussed the beauties and merits of the land where both had sought a refuge. The young count knew nothing of the etiquette of court, and it was for that reason the emperor liked talking to him ; he spoke out his thoughts naturally, frank, bravely ; he had not been taught to suit his words to his listener, but to express by them his own ideas. He spoke of England and France, of the differences between the two nations, and the national character.

He dared to say to the man who had conquered France, and ruled her in his own fashion, that France wanted more liberty ; but he agreed that the same amount of liberty accorded to Englishmen would be most injurious to Frenchmen.

The ministers of state and experienced courtiers wondered much at the charm the emperor found in the conversation of this fair, frank young nobleman. Nor was the empress less pleased with him ; she praised him exceedingly to his mother, and these praises were most grateful to the proud lady. The empress predicted that her son would be one of the rising men in France ; the happy countess agreed with her.

“ I shall always take an interest in his welfare,” said the beautiful sovereign, and the heart of Madame la Comtesse was elated at the words.

Then madame, encouraged by the kindness and grace of the imperial lady, spoke of what was now her one

great anxiety, in marriage — his marriage, which would make or mar his career.

The family had been so long in exile that they had in some degree fallen from the memory of the French nation. An alliance with some well-known noble race would, she felt sure, be the best way of bringing themselves back to the remembrance of the people.

The empress smiled as she listened.

" You will not have much difficulty in marrying your son, Madame la Comtesse," said her majesty. " There are many fair and noble ladies in France who will favor his suit."

Happy mother, to whom came no doubt of the future, no doubt but that when she pointed out a suitable wife for her son, he would at once marry.

She was a little struck by the fact that no matter how many beautiful girls he saw, the young count never seemed to be attracted by any of them. The young ladies themselves, some of them beautiful and well-born, wondered a little why no admiring glances from the fine, keen, gray eyes fell upon them — why the young count's handsome face never seemed the brighter for their presence in that court, where beautiful women rule supreme, it was a noticeable fact.

The young husband's heart was still faithful to his wife ; no other woman had any charm for him ; he saw no beauty even in the fairest of faces. No one there was like Lima — no one could be.

And while he enjoyed himself, while he was a welcome guest at the emperor's court, while he lived in the midst of luxury and magnificence, while the days for him were so full of novelty, of pleasure and gayety, that he could hardly count them as they passed, Lima was wearing her heart away on the banks of Allan Water.

She had plenty of letters from him, plenty of money : she could not imagine where it all came from. Every letter said how soon he was returning, but he never came. It was Christmas when he left and he told her he should be back long before the leaves were on the trees. Winter had passed and gone ; spring with its tender blossoms, had come and gone : summer was here, with its wealth of

roses ; still he had not come. She had lost none of her faith in him, none of her love for him, but she was desolate and lonely.

The principal of the college, who had always taken a lively interest in her, came to see her on the morning when he received the letter saying that Leon de Soldana would not be able to return to his duties at the college.

Not knowing the reason, the principal deeply regretted.

“I am sorry that he is not returning to us,” he said ; “my boys will never get on so well with any one else ; they were much attached to him.”

Lima smiled ; she remembered how her husband had spoken of the “sturdy British boys.”

“Do you know,” asked the principal, anxiously, “what he is going to do ?”

“No,” she answered, “I have not the least idea.”

That there was any thought of his restoration to France and to his estates, they had not the faintest or most distant dream.

“If you do not think it intrusive, I should like to ask what he says to you about returning, and his future. I should not like to lose his services, if I can possibly help it.”

The smile on her sweet face was a sad one, as she answered :

“He always says the same thing to me—that he shall return as soon as his business is ended ; but he never writes of what he is doing, or of the future,” and the principal looked at her with some little wonder.

“Do you not think it strange ?” he asked.

Her face flushed and her eyes drooped.

“It is his way,” she said, quietly ; “and I trust him.”

“So do I,” said the principal, “yet, none the less, I think his conduct strange. You must be very lonely here ?” he added.

“Yes, I am,” she said.

“May I ask you further—if your father is reconciled to you yet ?” he continued.

“No, and I fear never will be,” she answered. “I

wish it were so. It would be a great consolation to me if I could see them."

" You must be lonely," he repeated, thinking to himself how sad it was that this girl, so young and so lovely, should be left here alone and unprotected.

" If I knew where that young Soldana was I would write to him and give him a piece of my mind," thought the principal. " He ought either to have left her in the safe shelter of her own home, or to take care of her in the one he has made for her. And the miller, too, I should like to tell him what I think of him—to avenge what he considers his wrongs on a child like this."

" If you are in trouble," he said, somewhat abruptly, " come to me."

" I will," she answered, simply; and she pondered long over those words after he had gone away.

" In trouble." What trouble was he thinking of? What did he foresee for her that he should utter such words? True, she was very lonely, very desolate; her days and nights were full of weariness. But he *would come back*, as he said, and they would never be parted more. Up to this time she had never known a fear that he would not return.

It had not occurred to her; but her heart was heavy that evening as she walked the banks of Allan Water. The water was shining like gold in the light of the setting sun.

This time last year, when the golden glow lay on the shining waters, and on the green lines, *he* had been there with her—only a year ago.

It seemed to her that she could hear her own voice floating over the stream, and singing always the same sad song—

" On the banks of Allan Water,
Where the sweet spring-tide did fall,
Was the miller's lovely daughter,
Fairest of them all.
For his bride a soldier sought her,
And a winning tongue had he,
On the banks of Allan Water
None so gay as she."

Those sad, sweet words would haunt her :

“ For the summer grief had brought her,
And the soldier false was he,
On the banks of Allan Water
None so fair as she.”

Ah, these words were true ! None were so sad as she. Across the water she could see the dear old home, with its red roof, and the blue pigeons flying about their cote. Across that broad, bright sheet of water were the parents who had loved her so dearly. Her heart yearned toward them ; but she knew it was useless to appeal to her father.

She was so completely alone, and her heart so full of love — suddenly, as she stood watching the waters and thinking of the time when Leon had rowed her over this wide, beautiful mere, there came to her mind these words :

“ May the curse of the disobedient rest with you, and follow you wherever you may go ! ”

Although the sun was shining brightly, and the warm summer wind was laden with perfume, she shivered as one struck with mortal cold.

“ The curse of the disobedient ! ” Surely it was not that which had fallen on her now. It was not that which had left her — in the first year of her married life — a lone woman, desolate, and with an aching heart.

She stretched out her arms to the golden waters.

“ Oh, father, take back that curse ; oh, Heaven, do not let it fall on me.”

Would — would it fall on the beautiful, gentle head, and would it take that terrible shape — that her husband would never return to her ?

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN the young Count of Soldana returned to his estate of Belle d'Or his whole being seemed changed. That glimpse of the glories of a court, that close association with the greatest men of the day, that familiarity with the greatest luxury and the greatest magnificence of which the world can boast, had changed him. He belonged by birth to this new order of things ; his ancestors had been honored by the friendship of sovereigns. The past seemed to fall from him — the black, bitter past, all poverty and humiliation ; the very memory of it died from him. He seemed to live only in the present, only to have lived since he came to Belle d'Or. He returned with his mind full of grand thoughts and noble aspirations.

“He would never be content,” he said to himself, “with a life of pleasure ; he would work hard for France ; he would make the name of Soldana famous throughout the empire ; he would bring back more than the ancient glories of the old name, more than its ancient honors.”

His heart thrilled with ambition ; a passionate longing for honor and glory seized him. He longed for war that he might distinguish himself as a great warrior ; he longed to fling himself into the arena of politics, to be a great leader, an eminent statesman, a famous orator.

“Anything, anything !” he said to himself, with a toss of his handsome head. “The only thing to which I can never submit is to remain ‘nothing.’”

He had been well content when he first came to Belle d'Or with the novelty of his situation, with the power and luxury he enjoyed there, but that would never content him again.

A new soul was aroused in him ; fiery ambition, the longing to be greatest even amongst great men — all of which had lain dormant with him ; but circumstances had repressed rather than drawn out these characteristics.

Ambition was not of much use to the poor teacher of French, who had been advised to hide his title lest it should lay him open to great contempt. But now, that fiery and predominant passion surged in his soul. A rich man, that was all very well, but he wanted to be a great man.

And while heart and soul were given up to these ideas he never thought of England, of the cottage at Lynn, or of the beautiful young wife waiting there for him. If he did, it was with something like a passing shadow; but one morning came a long letter from Lima, and all her heart was in it. She told him how she missed him, how lonely and sorrowful, how sad and desolate she was. She reproached him, but her reproaches were so gentle, so tender, they were more like loving words.

"I cannot help thinking, Leon," she wrote, "that I ought to be *first*, not *last*, that I ought to come before business, no matter how important it is. You left me more than six months ago, and my life has been one longing for you ever since. Leon, if you cannot return to me, may I come to you? I do not care to live away from you any longer; tell me that I may come."

That letter startled him, and he was amazed to find how, in this thrilling hour of his triumph, he had almost forgotton his fair young wife. How vividly she rose before him, her fair sweet face with its dainty, healthy bloom; her golden hair, which had caught the brightness of the sun; the lovely eyes, always full of love and bright as stars; the tall, graceful figure, always draped in blue or white. How plainly he could see her standing on the banks of Allan Water, shading with her white hand her eyes from the light of the sun; he could almost hear the sweet voice calling "Leon, Leon;" he could hear the sweet sad words of her favorite ballad floating over the mere.

"On the banks of Allan Water
None so gay as she,"

She would not be gay now; the beautiful face would have lost its bloom. Ah, well, he must think of her: he must tell his mother of his marriage, and he must bring his wife home.

Yet he, who longed to be a great general, who longed to be an eminent statesman, and to make his name a power in the land, he was afraid to tell his proud patrician mother what he had done ; he was afraid to tell her that he had married a miller's daughter, though she was fair as a flower and bright as a sunbeam. He knew the terrible grief and pain it would cause her ; he knew that it would spoil her life, mar her triumph, and destroy all her new-found pleasure. He hated the very thought of causing her pain, he was so deeply touched by her happiness and keen enjoyment of all the good things that had come to them. Still she must be told—in a short time ; let affairs grow more settled yet. He might even run over to England to see her ; but he, the lord of Belle d'Or, shrunk from returning, even for an hour, to the scene of his poverty and exile.

He loved Lima, but he began to admit to himself it was just possible that his marriage had been a mistake ; he would not, even to his own thoughts, admit more than that.

His sweet, simple Lima was no more like these stately patrician ladies than a wild flower was like the queen of the conservatory. She would be out of place at the Court of the Tuileries, or the Palace of Versailles.

He felt that he had in great measure embarrassed himself and complicated his own fate. He loved Lima, but at the same time he felt that he would have been much happier had he been free.

He wanted to please his mother and make her happy. He knew that what he had to tell her would make her wretched for life.

"It would have been better even if I had told her quite at first," he said, to himself. He was not the happiest of men with this secret hanging over him. He contented himself for the time by writing a loving letter to Lima, and telling her he should soon be there. Then, in the flush of his grand aspirations, he forgot her again. Even had he been there, it was not to her that he would have turned for sympathy in these new thoughts and ideas. She was his love connected in his mind with beautiful pictures of Allan Water, and of flowers, of

sunshine and blue skies; but she had no connection whatever with his newly awakened ambition or his present life.

It was to his mother he turned for sympathy. She listened to him with a rapture of delight.

"Leon," she cried, "you are just what I wished you to be; you carry out my own thoughts. When we had been parted so long, and I wondered so much what you would be like if we met again, I always hoped you would be just what I find you are. I can give you no greater praise than that."

"You can give me none sweeter, mother," he answered, kissing her hand.

"I want you to be a great man," she said—"a man whose name will live in the memory of France. I am glad you are ambitious, Leon; no man ever makes a career who is not ambitious."

"I believe that," he said; but it is just possible that he might have learned nobler and better lessons from his mother.

"I have been thinking, Leon," said Madame la Comtesse, "that we ought to go to Paris for some months. Belle d'Or is delightful, nothing could be better, but you must be more in the world. I have lost my fear of Paris now, and shall be glad to go there. We must refurnish the Hotel d'Or, then my highest ambition will be gratified. I shall be queen of a salon. I shall gather a circle of the most eminent men in Paris around me. Oh, Leon! I long for the life, and you, my son, with your talents and—forgive me—your beauty, you may reach the highest position that any man can aspire to. I long for the time to come, Belle d'Or is so beautiful, but so quiet. I long for brilliant Paris, and to be floating down the stream. Are you willing, Leon?" she asked.

"I am more than willing," he answered. "After Compiègne, I shall not care so much for seclusion again."

"And, Leon," said his mother, "while we are discussing the subject, I wish to speak a few most serious words to you on the great event of your life—your marriage. As I have told you," she continued, "that event will make or mar your life. You must marry into some noble

family well established in France ; a family that has hold of the nation, as it were — a wealthy family ; a family whose influence and aristocratic connections will be of use to you. You understand, Leon ? ”

“ I understand,” he said, slowly.

Should he tell her now ? Alas, poor mother, must he destroy all her hopes and plans at one blow ? Alas, poor Liina, must he keep her at a distance and know she was unhappy ? He asked himself if ever man’s heart was torn before between mother and wife.

“ I was much gratified,” continued Madame la Comtesse, “ by the interest the empress expressed in your marriage.”

His face flushed with pleasure.

“ Did she ? It was very kind of her,” he replied, inwardly wondering what that imperial lady would say when she heard that he had married a miller’s daughter.

“ That is one reason why I am so anxious to go to Paris,” she continued. “ We shall go often to court, and in Paris you will see the daughters of the oldest and noblest families in France. I hope, Leon, that when you were in England you did not imbibe the absurd English ideas of marriage ? ”

“ How absurd ? ” he asked, briefly.

“ I mean marrying for love or any nonsense of that kind,” answered madame. “ I look upon the fashion of marriage as it exists in England, almost as a disgrace to the nation. Our notion of marriage is much better. Two young people well suited in fortune and position, the whole affair managed by their friends, and no nonsense about love. You must allow me to arrange your marriage, Leon.”

He turned from her with something that sounded like a groan.

CHAPTER XXV.

EVERY one who has studied life knows what life in Paris is; a delirium of delight, a dream of wonder, a daze of splendor, a time never to be forgotten.

When he first plunged into it, the young count was lost. Its delights, its thousand charms, its fascinations, even its perils and dangers have a charm that belong to no other city. It is true that at times a torrent of crimson blood stains its streets, that a mad wild mob burns, destroys and slaughters. It is true that men and women have danced round the scaffold where king, queen, the noblest and fairest in the land, perished; true that there runs ever an under current of wild, fierce revolution, but for all that, Paris stands by itself—the fairest, brightest, most brilliant city in the wide world.

It was all novelty to the young count. The brilliant gayety, the fashion, the luxury, the magnificence of Paris overwhelmed him; he was dazed, he could not understand it. At first he hardly thought of anything else; operas, theaters, balls, court entertainments, were all novelties to him; at first he thought he would go to the opera every night: that he should never weary of sweet sounds. Then the balls were so brilliant he gave them the preference—he was bewildered by so many pleasures.

“To think,” he said to himself, “that life held all this, and I did not know it.”

There was no one in all Paris so courted, so popular, or so fêted. Life was all sunshine, all brilliancy; and when it was known that the young Comte de Soldana was one of the greatest favorites at court, his popularity was increased.

Madame la Comtesse watched in silence. She had the great sense to understand that it must be so, that he must go through the intoxication of pleasure; and then his ambition, his grand and glorious desires and wishes, would all return to him.

It was so; he had great faults—this gallant young

count ; he was weak in submitting so entirely to his mother, weaker still in keeping his secret from her, but he was not a man whom mere pleasure could ever content : his ambition was too great.

A few weeks of bewilderment and intoxication, then the old desire awakened. It was in September then : a few more weeks and he would have been a whole year absent from Lima. He was beginning, and with good cause, to feel most miserable, and to feel that his secret was a burden he could not bear much longer.

No success could have been greater than that of Madame de Soldana. She was mistress of the most magnificently furnished house in Paris. She had drawn round herself a circle of the noblest and wisest men, of the most distinguished and beautiful women. Princes, artists, great writers, men of eminence crowded her salon : her statuesque grace, her patrician manner, her wonderful wit and talent attracted them. She was the kind of a woman worshipped in Parisian society, and she enjoyed her reign. There came a morning when madame sought her son, her face bright and animated.

He was seated in a room that had been fitted up entirely for his own use ; all the things he valued most were there — his favorite pictures and books ; a beautiful room, with a richly painted ceiling and superb carvings, long windows that opened on to a small but exquisite garden ; a fountain played in the midst, and roses bloomed all round. The count infinitely preferred this room to the suite of magnificent apartments which overlooked the grand garden of the Tuileries, and were considered the finest in Paris. It was here that madame found him. Madame herself looked wonderfully well, almost handsome. She wore a dress that could only be made in Paris, of rich black velvet, in which some threads of gold seemed to have been woven as if by accident, with ornaments of dead gold.

The young fellow's eyes brightened with pleasure when he saw her. He rose quickly and placed a chair for her.

“ What an unexpected pleasure to see you here in my room, mother,” he said.

"My son," said madame, with grave sweetness. "I have good news for you."

"You look like it!" he cried. "I have never seen you look so well or so happy."

"I have never been so happy," she answered, slowly. She was an impressive figure when she rose and stood before him, her stately form tall and erect, her black velvet robe sweeping the ground. She raised her proud face, she raised her clasped hands—she looked like some magnificent tragedy queen. "I thank Heaven, my son," she said, "I have lived to see every desire of my heart gratified. It is indeed good news that I bring you. I have found the very wife for you! If Heaven itself had interested itself in finding a wife for you, the choice could not have been a wiser one. My son," she repeated, "I bring you the best and happiest news that it is possible to bring."

For a few moments the young count was quite silent; he looked in wonder at the superb figure of his mother, at her inspired face and clasped hands, then seemed suddenly to realize what she meant—and what it meant for him.

"I have found a treasure," she said, "a pearl beyond price—I believe the one very girl in the wide world intended for you. She is beautiful, Leon, with a quick, proud, passionate beauty, which you adore. She is rich as few women in France are; she is a great heiress, and she is the only daughter of one of the oldest and most historical families in France. She was created—I shall always feel sure of that—expressly for you."

He laughed, but there was a curious ring in his laughter. She was too excited to notice it.

"But, mother," he cried hastily, "who is this paragon—this treasure?"

"Helene de Saison," she answered, slowly. "The sole heiress of the great De Saison family. If you had no other place in the world than that of her husband, you would be one of the foremost men in France; being what you are, and marrying her, you will be amongst the princes of the land. Her beauty is great, Leon, proud, patrician. She looks as though born to be a

queen. Her wealth is enormous. There is no fortune in France much larger than hers. She inherits all the De Saisons' property. She has a rent-roll that will astonish you. What is of still more consequence to you, she is connected with the noblest families in France; so by marrying her you will at once attain a position that years' working for could never give you; everything will be yours at once, great wealth, great power, great fame, and a beautiful young wife. Why, Leon, you ought to go down on your knees and thank Heaven. I do not believe there is another young man in France that has such a magnificent prospect before him."

Then Madame la Comtesse entered into a long description of the De Saison family; how their connections extended, how powerful and influential they were. Still her son sat silent. He seemed to be watching the red of the rose and the silver of the orange-blossoms. Ever afterward he detested those two flowers, but he was wondering how and in what words he should tell her.

Madame la Comtesse looked at her son. She wondered just a little at his silence. She had expected at least a cry of delight, an exclamation of pleasure, a few questions that betokened interest; anything but silence.

"You do not say anything, Leon," continued madame, "but I know you are delighted. I may tell you quite confidentially that the empress highly approves; indeed, I know of nothing so delightful, so suitable, nothing that could have been so advantageous to you, or have given so much happiness to me."

Still he looked only at the red of the rose and the silver of the orange-blossoms. Still no fear came to the mother whose brilliant hopes were so soon to be shattered in the dust. Madame continued:

"The empress has spoken to me about it, and I have seen Madame de Vesey, who is mademoiselle's aunt and guardian."

Then he knew that he must speak, but it would have been easier for him to have slain her than to have said what he had to say, but it must be done.

"Mother," he said, slowly, "do not lay any more plans

for me. I have not liked to tell you before, but the fact is — I am married ! ” and then silence, more bitter than death, fell over them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A SILENCE that was terrible. It was as though the very sounds of nature ceased — the whisper of the wind among the orange-blossoms, the falling of the soft rose-petals to the ground—a terrible, blank silence. Then he took courage — the words were spoken, nothing could unsay them ; they had fallen like thunderbolts on the clear summer air. The ice was broken — the first step, which costs so dearly, was taken. He took courage and looked at her ; but between his mother of now and his mother of five minutes since, with figure erect and outstretched hands, there was difference great as between a living and a dead woman. Her proud face had grown white, as with the very pallor of death ; a sudden paroxysm of horror seemed to have fallen over her ; the expression in her eyes frightened him.

No voice even from a sepulcher could have been more terrible than that in which she repeated the one word :

“ Married ! ”

The ice was broken now, and he could go on.

“ I ought to have told you long enough ago, mother,” he said ; “ but I knew that whenever you heard the news it would make you miserable, so I have delayed it as long as I dared.”

“ Married ! ” repeated madame, in the same terrible voice. “ I will *not* believe it — it is *not* true ! ”

“ It is true enough, mother,” he said, gravely. “ I wish I could have spared you all such pain.”

He went to her, but he saw that all the strength had gone from her ; the tall, erect figure was trembling and drooping ; all the grace and majesty seemed to have left it. She sunk on the couch that stood near the window, and seemed to lose almost the life that sustained her. He looked at her in wonder ; it was hardly possible that

this pallid, drooping, ghastly-looking woman was his stately mother.

"Mother," he cried, "do not—I cannot bear to see you look like this—do not look so wild, so desperate. Indeed, when you see her—"

But madame rose from her seat with a gesture of passionate pride and despair; she cried:

"Hush! You do not even understand. Hush!"

"I do understand," he replied, with dignity. "Since I have known you, mother, since I have lived with you, I have foreseen what pain it would give you. I understand."

Then, with a cry that seemed to cleave the air and the bright sunlight and rise even to the blue heavens, she turned to him and said, with a grand gesture of unutterable despair, "You have broken my heart!" And the simple sorrowful words pierced his heart.

He had not known how much he loved this stately, imperious mother until now, and the sight of her terrible sorrow was bitter to him. He tried to console her; he made her sit down again, and he knelt by her.

"You shall not be angry with me," he said. "You have had trouble and sorrow enough in your life. Mother, I hate myself for bringing more to you. Speak to me, talk to me! You look so white and wild, and almost desperate."

"You have spoiled my life," she moaned, "blighted it! ruined it!"

"I have done wrong, that I do acknowledge," he said, earnestly, "but it is not so bad—it is not indeed. My wife is young, beautiful, graceful, and a lady."

"Your *what*?" she cried.

"My wife!" he answered.

"Never let me hear you use those horrible words again," she cried, "never again!"

"But, mother, I must use them when I speak of her. I can speak of her by no other title. She is my wife."

Madame raised her pale, haggard face to his.

"Oh, my son, my son," she cried, "anything rather than this. I would almost as soon we had remained in exile; nothing will be of any use now. I have fought

against fate and circumstances for my whole life long, but I yield now; I shall fight no more. Just at the moment of victory! Oh, my son, my son!"

"It may not be so bad as you think," he said. "After all, I am a Soldana. I can stand on my own title, my own merits, my own fortune and influence, mother. I do not need the help of others."

She wrung her hands with a despairing gesture.

"You have spoiled your life," she cried. "The whole fabric lies in ruins at your feet. You have shattered the brightest dreams, you have destroyed the brightest pictures. Oh, my son, my son!"

He was silent for a few minutes while she sobbed out her woe. It was terrible to him to see her tears. She had been so proud, so imperial, he had never seen her weep.

After a time she recovered herself and looked at him.

"Tell me," she said. "Let me hear something of it, Leon. You have married an aristocrat, of course. The Soldanas have never married beneath them; they have always chosen wives from their own class. You, the head of your house, the last of your race, you have done the same?"

"No, mother, I have not. My wife is a lady; she is beautiful, more beautiful, perhaps, than any one you have ever seen. She is well educated and accomplished. She is the sweetest, the gentlest of human beings, but she is not what you would call a lady by birth."

"Perhaps, then, she has a great fortune?" said madame.

"No, she may have money at some future day but nothing that we shold call a fortune."

"Then, probably," said madame, with icy dignity, "she has great connections—*influential relations?*"

"No," he replied again; "she has none."

And then he felt something like fear; his eyes drooped; he dared hardly look in that proud, despairing face.

"She has no rank, no money, no influence! Why did you marry her, Leon?"

The broad, beautiful stretch of Allan Water seemed to rise before him; he saw the green grass, the sunlit water,

the green banks, and on the banks he saw the face and figure of Lima, his young wife.

“Why did you marry her?” repeated madame. “Answer me that question.”

“Because I loved her,” he replied; “loved her with all my heart.”

An expression of infinite contempt crossed her face.

“I thought as much,” she said, bitterly. “That absurd nonsense called love; and for that you have ruined a life that was full of fairest promise; for love, the weakest and most foolish of passions.”

“I found it stronger than death, mother,” he answered.

“Yes, because you yielded to it—weakly yielded. I would have trampled a thousand such passions under my feet. You have sacrificed the glory of a whole race—the brightness of a whole life.”

“Do not misjudge me, mother,” he said, humbly. “Remember that when I did this, there had never been a question, a hope of our restoration; remember that I had not a hope beyond spending the remainder of my life teaching at Lynn, and she—oh, mother! when I saw her—when she came into my life so beautiful, so fair, so loving—she brightened it so that I could not live without her.”

“Absurd!” cried madame; “a man whose hopes and thoughts ought all to be centered in France.”

“But France would not have me, mother, in those days,” he said. “Oh, mother, can you not realize what my life was—so desolate, so lonely; no friends, no companions, no home, no prospects; spending the sunny hours of the summer days teaching those sturdy British boys? No one loved me, no one cared for me; no face was the brighter for my coming, no tears would have been shed for my death.”

“Leon,” cried madame, sternly, “I am afraid you are sentimental.”

“Are you not, mother?” he asked, gently.

“I hope not. I hope to Heaven not!” she cried, angrily. “Spare me all that nonsense, if you please.”

He bowed, but went on:

“You can imagine what a change it made in my life

when she came into it ; she brightened it. I believe that in my cold, sorrowful exile I had not really lived until I knew her, and I learned to love her—forgive me, mother — so well — ”

“ Tell me the facts ; spare me the love ! ” cried madame.

There was a soft, warm light in his keen gray eyes that told how the topic touched him.

“ I could not have loved an ordinary girl,” he continued ; “ but she might have been a young princess, she is so fair, so dainty. She is so beautiful that people call her ‘ The Belle of Lynn.’ ” His heart warmed to the theme. “ That was how I first came to hear of her. She was called the belle of Lynn, and, mother, listen : her home lies close to a broad, beautiful mere, known as Allan Water ; it was on its banks I met her first.

“ You will forgive me when you see her ; her eyes are beautiful and blue, like wet violets ; her hair has the sheen of gold ; her face is the sweetest and fairest that poet could paint :

“ ‘ On the banks of Allan Water,
None so fair as she.’ ”

“ I want facts, as I told you, and not sentiment ; still less, poetry,” said madame, sternly.

“ Oh, mother, were you never young ? ”

Madame interrupted him.

“ I repeat that I will not listen to nonsense. It is of the follies of your youth we are speaking, and not of mine.”

His face flushed hotly, but he did his best to exercise self-control ; her words were hard to bear.

“ Mother, do not be so hard, so cruel ! ” he pleaded. “ I am quite sure that when you see my wife you will love her.”

The fine scorn and bitter contempt on madame’s face were not good to see.

“ You forget one thing, my son,” she continued : “ you have gone into raptures over a pretty face, you have shown a great deal of shallow sentiment, but you have

not told me with whom Monsieur le Comte de Soldana has allied himself."

"What will you say, mother, when you learn that I have married — a miller's daughter?" And he turned away lest he should read too plainly the wrath in his mother's face.

CHAPTER XXVII.

NEVER was passion seen so terrible **as that** which gleamed on madame's face.

"A miller's daughter," she said, slowly. "A commendable alliance, surely! The last of the Soldanas, and a miller's daughter! Had you lost your brains or your senses when you did this?"

"Neither, mother; I had simply lost my heart," he replied.

She surveyed him with infinite scorn.

"A fine ending to all my plans and hopes for you," she said. "How could you be so cruel, Leon—so unjust to me?"

"Do me justice, mother. Remember that I had no idea of what was about to happen," he answered.

"Tell me one thing," she cried, with hasty impatience; "if you had foreseen this change, should you then have contracted this unfortunate marriage?"

He thought for some minutes before he answered her. He loved Lima, but this new life with its pleasures and honors, was very dear to him.

"Answer me!" cried madame, imperiously.

"No," he replied, slowly, "I do not think I should. If I had foreseen this great change in my life, I should have left Lynn. I should not have married."

Her face cleared when she heard him say this.

"I am glad you have the sense to acknowledge that," she said.

She seemed utterly bewildered and discomfited, quite unable to rally from what seemed to her the greatest blow she had ever received. After these few words had been spoken, she sat quite silent for some minutes brooding

over her own thoughts, and madame's face was not pleasant to see.

The young count, with his usual light-heartedness, began to recover a little now that the ordeal was half over. He had at least gone through the worst part of it ; the news was told.

She would recover in time, he said to himself, and when she saw Lima all would be well. She could not fail to be won by that sweet, winsome face. This cloud would soon pass. He felt some regret that his mother's plans had been so baffled, and he thought with sorrow of all the glories that might have been his — not that he loved Lima less, but that he saw so plainly what his career might have been with all the advantages his mother could have secured for him.

"It is too late to think of it now," he said to himself, "and, after all, I have the dearest little wife in the world."

Madame la Comtesse did not leave the room ; when she finished speaking she retained her seat near the window, and seemed buried in thought. Her son seemed to think it better to preserve the silence than break it.

"It is a strange turn for Fate to have taken in any man's life," he thought.

Then the sunny skies of France faded ; the silver orange-blossoms and the fountains vanished. It was moonlight, and there was hardly a ripple on the shining breast of Allan Water ; the rays of the moon silvered the great lime trees, and he was rowing swiftly and silently across the mere. So vividly did the picture rise before him that he could almost hear the strokes of the oars.

A sweet, clear voice came floating from the casement window ; he could hear the words :

" For the summer grief had brought her,
And the soldier false was he ;
On the banks of Allan Water
None so sad as she.

That was his dream ; the reality was that he started to find his mother looking at him, her dark eyes, full of fire and impatience, fixed full upon him.

"Leon," she said, "I want you to make me a promise. Let this most absurd of all marriages remain a secret between us for, say, at least six weeks. I have an idea. I will not tell you what it is, but I shall act upon it. In the meantime, will you promise me not to speak of it to any creature living?"

"I promise," he replied, thinking that it was not much for her to ask him after the pain he had caused her.

"Remember what you are promising," she said, sternly. "Do not speak lightly, Leon. You gave me your word of honor that during the next six weeks you will not mention the fact of your marriage to any creature living, on or under any consideration. When you have kept the secret so long, six more weeks will not hurt you."

"I give my promise, mother," he said, "on the faith and honor of a gentleman."

"I am satisfied," said she. "We will not discuss it even between ourselves. I must exact another promise — that is, you will not during those six weeks go to England. Of course, I cannot ask you not to write to the person there — but you will not go?"

"I will not, mother," he said.

"I am more content," said Madame la Comtesse. "This has been a cruel little interlude, Leon. You must make up to me for the heartache you have given me. Come with me to-night to Madame de Sante's ball?"

"I will go with pleasure," he said, only too delighted to bring back a smile to her face.

"This, you will understand, Leon," she said, "is a truce between us—a truce for six weeks; then there will be active warfare."

"There can never be war between you and me, mother," he said, kissing the white, jewelled hands that she held out with more sign of relenting than she had hitherto shown.

"A six weeks' truce," she said; "then I shall follow out the workings of my idea."

"What will that result in, mother?" he asked with a smile.

“Something that will astonish you very much,” answered Madame la Comtesse; “but we will say no more now—silence for six weeks.”

Then, in her most stately manner, madame left the room. The young count turned to that refuge for the destitute—a cigar; and as he watched the rings of the blue smoke ascend, he wondered much what his mother could mean. A six weeks’ truce! Well, that would not matter so much. He must write again to Lima, and tell her that circumstances had chained him for six weeks longer, and then he would go and bring her home.

But although he loved her, he did not look forward to this bringing her home with any great rapture of delight. It would all be so strange, so novel to her. It would be so long before she could take her place as Lady Chatelaine. Her, the sweet, gentle Lima, who had never known anything much more stirring than the banks of Allan Water, his mother would never quite agree with. Indeed, there could never be two mistresses in one house. Either his wife must reign or his mother. His wife ought to be mistress and ruler; he knew that perfectly well, but he knew also that she must first be taught. He saw many perplexities when he did bring Lima home, but he must trust to fortune. He was most thankful that he had spoken to his mother; the weight had gone from his heart and mind now. Madame la Comtesse wore a superb costume for the ball. When her toilet was completed she went to her son’s room; she loved the words in which he praised her.

“Why, mother, you look superbly handsome,” he said; “give me purple velvet and diamonds above everything else.”

She did what was very unusual with her, for she was not at all a demonstrative woman. She laid her arms round his neck and kissed him.

“I am proud of my son,” she said, and she had some reason for her words.

Never did the young count look more handsome, more gallant; the ease and grace of his figure, the beauty of his face, the charm of his gracious manner were all most attractive. He was struck by the ease with which

his mother had forgotten, or seemed to have forgotten, their very unpleasant interview. He would have been surprised if he had known that she had thought of nothing else, and had concentrated the whole power of her mind and thoughts on that one fact alone. No one who saw the proud patrician, with her queenly carriage and imperial bearing, could have guessed that her mind was racked with pain, and her soul darkened with a black, ugly shadow.

It was a brilliant ball, as those given by Mme. de Sante always were. Some of the most beautiful and brilliant women in Paris were present. The young count enjoyed a ball; his whole artistic nature delighted in the brilliancy of the scene, in the superb flowers, the rich dresses, the magnificent jewels, the beautiful faces; but to-night he saw a picture that woke all the poetry within him into sudden life.

Pretty little anterooms, cozily furnished, opened out on both sides of the ball-room—rooms that were daintily arranged, with plenty of flowers and lounges; they were separated from the ball-room by rich curtains of crimson velvet, which were drawn to either side, forming an arch.

The young count was looking carelessly along the ball-room when he saw this picture, which at first meant nothing more than a picture to him. The crimson velvet curtains were parted, and in the archway stood a young girl. She was tall and slender; a rich dress of primrose-colored brocade fell round her in folds that would have charmed a sculptor; clouds of white lace were caught up by sprays of Mareschal Neil roses; magnificent diamonds shone in her dark hair and round her white throat; her dress was after the latest fashion—the arms bare almost to the shoulder; and the first thing that drew his attention was the whiteness and beauty of the rounded arms and perfect hands; then he saw her face, and its beauty startled him. Proud, rare, flashing loveliness that had in it something half-defiant, half-imperious—a face that Titian would have painted, with its rich, rare coloring; dark, bright eyes, black, yet with golden light in their depths, fringed with dark, silken lashes, that were a beauty in themselves; a mouth that

would have made any woman's face rarely lovely—it had the freshness, the bloom, the sweetness of a pomegranate blossom, with lines and curves of unequaled grace; a round, white throat, and a beautiful neck and shoulders, formed a picture rarely seen.

"I call that a dream," said the young count to himself.

He watched her intently. She seemed to be looking for some one. She glanced eagerly up and down the room, then slowly withdrew.

He saw the last gleam of the diamonds, the last glimmer of the wonderful brocade, and he roused himself with a sigh. Surely he had been dreaming a dream.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FOR some time the young count did not again see the beautiful picture, as in his mind he called her; but a pause came in the dancing, and he saw her at the other end of the room talking to Mme. de Sante.

If he had thought her beautiful before, how much more lovely she looked now that she was talking, laughing, and animated, her eyes shining like stars, the curves of her lips so graceful as she smiled. As he looked at her he thought of Liina, and he said to himself that surely she and this stranger must be the two fairest women in the wide world. The contrast between them was great; even as he looked at this young face he felt the different influences of their beauty.

There was a sweetness and gentleness in Lima's face that instantly brought all good and holy thoughts into the minds of those who looked upon her. It was not so with the face before him; its radiance, its loveliness, its pride were conspicuous, but it gave no impression of goodness. There was something in it—he could not tell what; in fact, he never knew—but there was something that left upon him an impression the reverse of good. He tried to analyze it, but found that impossible. An hour later he found himself with his mother at the end of the ball-room. He was not dancing, but the band was

playing a delicious waltz, and again he saw the gleam of the primrose brocade and the shining of the diamonds.

"Mother," he asked, quickly and suddenly, "do you know who that young lady is?"

"Which young lady, Leon? There are so many."

"One in a dress just the color of English primroses," he replied.

"English primroses?" laughed madame. "What a comparison!"

She spoke coldly, but her face flushed, and a light as of triumph shone in her eyes.

"She wears diamonds," he continued, "and carries a bouquet of Gloire de Dijon roses."

"Quite a picture," commented madame.

"That is just what I said when I saw her," cried the young count. "See, mother, she is standing by the great statue of Flora."

Madame la Comtesse carefully repressed all signs of emotion; she answered indifferently enough.

"That is Mademoiselle Helene de Saison;" and then, as though the subject were one of perfect indifference to her, she turned away. It was the most judicious thing she could have done. If she had remained he would have overwhelmed her with questions; as it was, she left him to think.

And he did think many things.

So this was Helene de Saison—the girl whom even the beautiful empress said would be a most suitable match for him—the girl whom his mother wished with her whole heart that he would marry, and if he had never seen Lima, if he had never wandered to the banks of Allan Water, he would have been free to marry this beautiful creature.

Helene de Saison—the most beautiful girl and the richest heiress in France—the girl who had it in her power to make her husband one of the foremost men in France! Still no feeling of regret over his marriage came to his mind or passed through his heart. He was simply full of wonder. He had not paid much attention to his mother's description of Helene de Saison: indeed,

he had smiled to himself, thinking it exaggerated; he found it fell short.

He watched her; every gesture was quick, proud, and graceful. He smiled again when he thought how much like his mother she was—and just as proud.

“They would agree well,” he thought to himself; and then she was gone. He could watch her no longer, nor did he see her again that night. A curious calm seemed to fall over him; he did not care to dance any more; by a strange fancy all the music played seemed to run into the old-fashioned air of the banks of “Allan Water.” Whether waltz, quadrille, or galop were played, he could hear in his own fancy the soft, sweet strain of the ballad. Then the words would rise to his lips with such force that at times he was compelled to repeat them.

“ For the summer grief had brought her,
And the soldier false was he;
On the banks of Allan Water
None so sad as she.”

Why should he be compelled, as it were, to repeat those lines? why should they haunt him any more than the other lines of the poem? He was not false—he had no thought of being false; how absurd, in the midst of a brilliant Parisian ball-room, to have such fancies.

He was almost glad when the ball was over; yet it struck him as being rather strange that his mother had not made the least attempt to introduce him to the girl whom she had been so anxious he should marry. He thought she might have made some little effort, but he came to the conclusion that she had given up all idea of it, so that an introduction was not needed.

It was strange, too, that as they drove home, Madame la Comtesse never mentioned her. She discoursed with great animation on the beautiful women present, but the name of Helene de Saison never crossed her lips. It was in sheer desperation that he said, at last:

“ I thought Mademoiselle de Saison the most beautiful girl there,” he said.

“ Did you ? ” replied madame, indifferently.

“ I admired her toilet more than any other,” he said, longing to hear something more of her.

"I did not notice it," said madame. "I thought the English embassadress the best-dressed woman in the room."

No other word of "la belle Helene."

"Evidently my mother has given up all thought of it," he said to himself, while madame smiled — a quiet, stealthy smile that meant much.

He wrote a long letter to Lima the next day. He had an uneasy, unsettled feeling upon him, as though he had unconsciously done her some wrong.

The next day brought a great delight—an invitation to a ball given by the emperor at the magnificent Palace of the Tuilleries. The young count had never been more interested. He wondered if "la belle Helene" would be there. He longed to ask madame, but did not like.

Shyly enough, at last, he said :

"Mother, will your Princess Helene be at the emperor's ball?"

In her whole life madame never felt such a thrill of triumph. He had been thinking about her evidently, and, from his question, desired to meet her again.

"Why do you call Mademoiselle de Saison 'my Princess Helene?'" she asked, and the tones of her voice made the young man's face flush.

"The name suits her," he said. "I always call her 'Princess Helene' in my thoughts."

"I did not know that she was in your thoughts. Why call her 'my princess?'"

"She seems to be associated in my mind with you," he replied; "but I cannot tell why."

"It is an unmeaning phrase," said madame. "In your place, I should not repeat it."

"Princess Helene ought to have been her name," he repeated, good-humoredly. "Why, mother, she is the ideal of a princess."

Madame made no answer; she would not, by one word, encourage him by speaking of her favorite.

"You do not tell me, mother, if Princess Helene is going!" he said.

"I do not know," was madame's answer. "I cannot even form an opinion."

She would not ask even why he wished to know, which he had quite expected. He thought a great deal of the forthcoming ball. He wondered much if he should see her; if there would be any introduction; if she would talk to him; and when the evening of the ball came, he felt in some vague fashion that a new epoch in his life had arrived—that a new and novel sensation had come to him.

The ball, as was usual at that brilliant court, was magnificent. The empress had never looked more beautiful; there was a brilliant throng of guests; the music was perfect; the lights and flowers beautiful. It was like a glimpse of fairy-land, and the young count was lost in admiration of the magnificence of the scene. Then again he saw her, but to-day she looked paler and graver; she was with her aunt, Mme. de Vesey. He knew that it was not in accordance with French custom for a young lady to appear in public or to dress with such magnificence. He came to the conclusion that mademoiselle was allowed to depart from the strict laws laid down on the subject on account of having spent much time in traveling, and then on account of her position.

How or by whom he was introduced to her he hardly remembered. It was not by his mother, nor did he guess that his mother had not lost sight of him since he entered the ball-room, and had most carefully "led up" to this event. It was most decidedly a new sensation to have those dark, beautiful eyes flashing for one moment into his, then drooping as they had never done before. She seemed to be all radiance; the light shone in her jewels; her dress had in it something of the rich gleam of sunbeams. As he looked at her he thought of the other fairer, sweeter face that he had seen first on the banks of Allan Water. He asked for the honor of one dance, almost hoping she would decline, for he had a certain sense of uneasiness in her presence, although he had so much longed to see her. It was not at all that he was in love with her—he had no thought of love; it was a feeling that, in some serious way, their destinies were crossed.

Princess Helene, as he called her, was tired, and did not care to dance much.

"Let us find my aunt," she said. "I should like to look at some of those pictures."

But finding Mme. de Vesey was a more difficult matter than they had anticipated; in fact, in time they had forgotten why they started. Wandering through those magnificent rooms, they talked at ease. The young count forgot his temporary embarrassment, his strange sensation of novelty, and lost himself in delight. Helene de Saison was one of the most brilliant talkers; every one agreed that it was a treat to listen to her conversation. There was no poetry, no spirituality about it; girls of her temperament and character have seldom much of either of those qualities, but there was a verve, a fire and originality about it that charmed every man who talked to her. A touch of satire, a flash of wit, a brilliant repartee, a certain fearlessness of ideas, picturesque language, a natural flow of eloquence, made the charm of her conversation.

When the young count went home that evening it was not of her beauty he thought, but of her wonderful brilliancy. He had not known that such women as Helene de Saison existed. She was a new revelation to him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A MAGNIFICENT room in a magnificent house in the Champs Elyées, a room furnished with such true artistic taste, such luxury, it was a pleasure to look around it; a room filled with the fragrance of innumerable flowers, bright and charming; the large windows overlooking bright *parterres* of flowers and tall, spreading, green trees. Some people said the Hôtel de Saison was one of the brightest houses in Paris. A well-filled balcony of flowers stood before each window, varied in hue; gleams of rich gold, of deep purple, of crimson and white, seemed to attract one; a house that seemed to have a smile on the front of it.

In this magnificent saloon, Helene de Saison sat alone. It was the forenoon of a clear September day, and the bright sunbeams made the lovely room more cheerful still. Certainly, the most beautiful object in that room was the girl herself. She had been reading, but the volume she had held in her hands had fallen to the ground unknown to her, and she was thinking deeply; a smile, sweet and tender, parted her lips; in her eyes was the light that never yet lay on land or sea.

Certainly a most beautiful face, a face full of pride and passion, but there was in it something that would make one hesitate before trusting her absolutely.

In the curves of that beautiful mouth was there a line which suggested cruelty — selfishness? In those brilliant eyes was there a gleam of pride that was dangerous? What was it that dissatisfied a keen reader of character and sent him away not well content? Just now there was a calm over the beautiful face; the parted lips were smiling; the girl's thoughts were deep and pleasant. She looked up when the door opened and Mme. de Vesey entered.

“It is not often that I find you dreaming.”
Helene looked up with a smile and sigh.

"That is, if you but understood it, aunt, the first dream of my life."

"I hope it was a happy one, my dear," said the elder lady, smiling.

"I was thinking of the ball last night," she continued, "and, Aunt Emilie, I have seen a real living hero at last."

Mme. de Vesey was evidently accustomed to receiving startling communications from her niece. She seldom expressed any curiosity or alarm at any of the theories her niece advanced.

"Yes," she repeated, "I have seen a real living hero, and I thought the age of heroes was past. I have seen a Prince Charming, and I thought all the Prince Charmings were dead."

"Who is it, Helene?" asked Mme. de Vesey.

"Monsieur le Comte de Soldana," she replied. "I talked to him for a long time last evening; he told me all the story of his exile."

"Why do you call him a hero?" asked Mme. de Vesey.

"Why," repeated mademoiselle, with a gleam in her dark eyes, "because he is one; he is handsome—I do not believe that in all France you would find a more handsome man—he is gallant, and princely in his bearing."

"All that does not make him a hero," interrupted madame.

"It does in my eyes," said Helene, in her most superb fashion.

"Scarcely, in the eyes of others," she replied.

"Have you no better reason for calling him a hero than physical beauty and a charming presence?"

"Yes; he has been in exile. Fancy living all those years in exile. He loves England, though; he told me that the first night he saw me. He was struck by the dress I wore; he said that it was the exact shade of an English primrose. I am glad he went to England, aunt, and I am glad that I speak English."

"Then I am to understand that the young count is a hero because he has been in exile," laughed Mme. de Vesey.

"I think him so; but the chief reason I have, after all, auntie, for thinking him a hero, is that he is the only man I have ever dreamed about after a ball. I was much struck with all he told me. At first he seemed shy and embarrassed, then, when we began to talk about England, it was quite another thing. He did not know that I had been there."

"You like the young count, then?" said Mme. de Vesey.

"Yes, very much," replied Helene, frankly. "I have met no one in society who has pleased me more. Aunt," she continued, "it is a strange thing, but when I saw Mosieur le Comte I said to myself, 'if ever I marry, that is the kind of man I should like to marry.'"

"Is it?" asked Mme. de Vesey, innocently, as though she had not discussed such a marriage twenty times over with Madame la Comtesse de Soldana.

"How differently marriages are managed in England," said Helene, dreamily. "I have just been reading an English novel; Mrs. Gaskell's 'Daughters and Wives.' I do not know whether, after all, their system is not the best."

"Do you think so?" asked madame, with a smile, which fortunately her proud and beautiful niece did not see.

"I do. A French girl has no chance of pleasing herself; she has to marry the man whom her parents and friends select for her; the last thing thought of is whether she will like him or not. It seems merely a matter of business, that he has so much money, and she has so much, and that the two sums will insure competency.

"I think a little romance creeps in every now and then," said madame.

"I do not care for romance," said the young heiress, frankly, "but it strikes me that we could imitate the English fashion with advantage."

"I think, my dear, it all comes to pretty much the same kind of thing in the end," said madame, cynically.

"I think—mind, Aunt Emilie, I am not quite sure, but I think I like the English style best."

"Since when?" asked madame, simply.

The color deepened on the beautiful face — that was a significant question — "Since when?"

"I have been thinking of it this morning," she replied, quite unconscious of the manner in which she was betraying herself and the subject of her own thoughts.

"In France," said Mme. de Vesey, "when a mother has a daughter to marry, she looks carefully around amongst her neighbors and friends. She sees some young man whom she thinks eligible; she goes to his mother, tells her what her daughter's fortune will be, and the whole matter can be settled between them. That is the ordinary routine — there are exceptional cases; there are cases even where the young people have met as strangers, and have fallen in love with each other, and have married in spite of the opposition of all their friends and relatives. I am afraid you sympathize just a little with that;" for Helene looked up with a gleam of amusement in her eyes.

"I am afraid I do," said the heiress of the De Saisons.

"In England," continued madame, "a very different order of things exists. There young people have more liberty; they meet frequently in society; there is less restraint. You, Helene, have more liberty than any other French young lady whom I know. The young people in England meet continually; they sing and dance together; they go to parties and balls; the consequence is, they fall in love with each other, sometimes wisely, sometimes foolishly; they choose for themselves, but in England there are exceptions to this rule. There are match-making mothers who look out for the most eligible men, and daughters who marry for money. Each system has its advantages."

"I prefer the English," said Helene de Saison, in her most decided fashion.

"Then it will be useless for me to offer any suggestions," said Mme. de Vesey. "There will be no arranging an alliance for you, Helene; on the other hand, I advise you strongly not to fall in love."

"Why not, aunt?" she asked.

"Why, my dear, you would suffer; your nature is not

one of those, simple and sweet, that pass through life easily ; you can suffer keenest pain and keenest pleasure. There is more pain than pleasure in love."

" You do not seem to think much of love, aunt ! " cried the heiress.

" No, my dear ; nor will you do so at my age," laughed madame.

It was the dearest wish of her heart that the young niece and heiress given to her charge should marry well. She had spoken to Mme. de Soldana, and, so far as they could, the whole matter had been arranged ; but there was a fatal flaw in the case when the countess found out the secret of her son's marriage. Of it she had spoken no word. She had merely said to Mme. de Vesey that she thought it advisable to let the young people see a little of each other before the subject was mentioned, and Mme. de Vesey was quite willing. Madame was very much amused by that conversation. She saw plainly enough that Helene de Saison, one of the proudest girls in France, had fallen in love with the young count without being in the least degree conscious of it.

CHAPTER XXX.

It was drawing toward the close of October when the next link in the chain was forged. The beautiful heiress and the young count had met continually in society. She had fallen deeply in love with him, but he had gone no further than great admiration for her talent and great enjoyment in her powers of conversation. Madame la Comtesse had been perfectly neutral. She never spoke to her son of Helene, she never alluded to his marriage; it was a six weeks' truce; before the six weeks were ended she made a masterly movement in the game. She invited Mme. de Vesey and Mlle. de Saison to Belle d'Or. There she thought, in the quiet and solitude of the lovely country, her son would find a charm in the companionship of the beautiful young heiress that he would never find in town, and there she would break to him her idea and plan for the future. Mine. Vesey was pleased to accept the invitation; she was tired of the brilliant gayeties of Paris, and glad of repose.

To Princess Helene, as the count always called her, the bare idea was delightful. Madame la Comtesse invited several other guests, and as the two families had been very intimate in Paris, there was nothing unusual in the visit. Madame did not intend to remain there long; she would return to Paris before Christmas. It was, then, during that time, that Leon de Soldana found how beautiful life could be made. Living in that magnificent house, in the midst of the most beautiful scenery in the world; surrounded by the most amusing and brilliant society, the days seemed to fly. He did not own to himself that he loved Lima less. He still wrote to her, filling his letters with promises that were as vain as the others he had made, while every hour he became more and more engrossed in his new life.

He had seen very little of the world before returning to France; he had never been in the society of ladies; Lima was the only one he had known, and he was

charmed with those who surrounded him here ; his mother, so high-bred, with her statuesque grace and imperial manner ; Mme. Vesey, all that was most amiable and gracious ; Helene de Saison, beautiful and clever ; it was a new life to him. He said to himself, over and over again, that he did not love Lima less ; but she did not belong to this new life—she had no share in it.

During those evenings, when they had music, dancing, conversation that was bright with wit and repartee, he thought of the homely parlor in Sweetbrier Cottage where he was wont to sit with his books and papers while Lima sat with him reading and sewing. How fair and gentle, how loving she had always been. He could see the golden head bent down and the white, slim hands holding the book ; he tried to fancy how she would look here amidst the magnificent luxury of this new home—how she would look amongst these high-bred, nobly born women. Fairer than any, but—and he owned it to himself with a shudder—she would seem out of place. The rose that bloomed so sweetly on the banks of Allan Water would lose its freshness and sweetness in the atmosphere of Belle d'Or. The pretty, tender ways that had seemed so delightful to him in the darkness and dreariness of his exile would be laughed at here.

He could fancy Princess Helene talking to Lima ; the two differed so greatly that they might have belonged to different worlds. The delicate, piquant wit, the talent for repartee in which Princess Helene excelled, were things that Lima would not understand, while she would have laughed with scorn at Lima's loving, gentle ways.

He began to realize that when he brought Lima home, things would not go on so smoothly as now. She would not be at her ease with these brilliant friends of his, neither would they feel at home with her ; for some time, at least, she would have to keep away from this which was to him a charmed circle. She would grow accustomed to it and learn how to take her place in it, by degrees.

But he was compelled to own to himself that he did not look forward with any enthusiasm to bringing Lima home. He tried not to think of it, to enjoy the present and make the most of it. Lima belonged to that horrible,

poverty-stricken past that he never cared to remember. He could hardly realize now that there had been a time when he had lived in one room, and had known what it was to be hungry. Away with such memories, banish such thoughts! There was the sunny laughter of Mme. Vesey, the clear, musical voice of Princess Helene. He would think of brighter things. He little realized how far he had gone astray, when he put all thoughts and recollections of his wife away from him as being troublesome and unpleasant.

"I cannot think," said Princess Helene to him one morning, "why you will never take me across the lake. There is an island just in the middle of it, that I have been longing to visit ever since I have been at Belle d'Or. You are usually, Monsieur le Comte, the most chivalrous of gentlemen — but twice I have suggested that you should row me there, and twice you have most politely declined."

"I am hardly conscious of it," he replied.

"Then be doubly conscious now," she answered, laughingly. "Atone for it. Say, 'Mademoiselle, the morning is bright and fair — charming for October; the lake is smooth, the air delicious, and I shall be charmed to row you across to the island.'"

He repeated the words after her — she laughed.

"And I, Monsieur le Comte, shall be delighted to go."

There was a pleasant walk to the lake-side. The lake was one of the great beauties of Belle d'Or. A pretty little boat-house stood on its banks; two or three pleasure-boats were always kept there. They were soon seated in the lightest and swiftest, the young count rowing with a firm, bold stroke.

"I consider this a great pleasure," said the beautiful girl. "I love water; I love the great, shining sea that lies between England and France; I love the blue sea that washes our southern shores; I love all the rivers and lakes in England. I like the deep, clear pools, and deep, dark tarns. I wonder that you, being in England so long, did not learn to like rowing."

"I do like it," he replied. "The proof is, that I —

you must forgive the seeming vanity of my words: you provoked them—the proof is, that I excell in it."

"Then why did you not offer to take me to the island before?" she said.

And he did not tell how distasteful the thought had been to him. It would bring the past so vividly before him; he could not fancy any other face than Lima's before him. How often he had rowed the boat on the broad stretch of Allan Water, looking with worshipping eyes into the beautiful face opposite to him. He was not particularly sensitive now, but he shrunk from the associations; he remembered so well when he had rowed to the water-lilies; he could see Lima's beautiful eyes watching him now.

"Monsieur le Comte, you do not look happy," said Princess Helene; "you have a sad expression on your face, in your eyes. How is it?"

"I ought to have just the reverse," he replied.

"I know what it is," she said; "the boat and water bring back to your mind something you would like to forget."

It was a keen, clever guess of hers, made quite at random, but it was an arrow that reached its mark.

"I should like to forget," he said, in a low voice, speaking quite unconsciously.

"Forget what?" asked mademoiselle, quickly.

He looked at her, with a sudden flush on his face.

"I did not think what I was saying: I mean that I should like to forget all about my exile except the beautiful land I lived in."

"Then you have no associations with a boat and the water?"

"I shall have for the future," he replied, with a gallant bow; and mademoiselle smiled.

Still, although he had one of the most beautiful and wittiest of women in France for his companion, he was not, and he did not look, happy. It brought Lima back so vividly to him, that he could have cried out her name; but the face opposite to him, with its dark, passionate beauty, was not the fair face of Lima; and the voice

that murmured witty, piquant words, as they crossed the lake, lacked the loving tones of her voice.

He had never thought so much about her since he left her as he did now, and the thoughts were not calculated to make him happy.

"You are distract, Monsieur le Comte," said his fair companion. "Your work is mechanical; you are putting no animation into it. I talk to you, and you do not listen very attentively. As your punishment, you must take upon yourself now the duty of pleasing me."

"The most delightful that you can give me" he said. But, ah me! the banks of Allan Water, the fair green banks of Allan Water, so different from the trim, well-kept banks of the lake!

But he must talk to her, and he did. They reached the pretty island on which grew wild flowers and ferns.

"I am Miranda on the enchanted island," said Princess Helene. "How beautiful it is to steal an hour from life like this."

She smiled more sweetly than she had ever smiled; her dark eyes lingered on his fair, handsome face; her voice had a ring in it that he had never heard before. Alas, for the banks of Allan Water, and the gentle young wife he had met on its banks!

It was a pleasant half hour that they spent on the island. Princess Helene laughed when she spoke of it, but she wondered also just a little that he had paid her no compliments, and that he had not seemed to care more about the expedition.

She little dreamed that the handsome young count had but one thought, and it was a longing that she should know he was married, yet he did not like to break his word to his mother and tell her.

CHAPTER XXXI.

“LEON,” said Madame la Comtesse to her son, “our six weeks’ truce is ended and, we are going to fight this matter out—to the bitter end.”

The young count smiled frankly, with a vague wish in his heart that it need not be fought out at all. By this time he had completely yielded to his mother’s influence; her mind, being by far the stronger of the two, had gained complete ascendancy over his. He loved her, so he did not like to pain her; he feared her, so he did not care to vex her or annoy her.

“There can be no bitter end, mother,” he answered; “there can never be anything bitter between you and me.”

“I am not so sure of it,” said madame. “I have followed out my idea, which proved to be a correct one. I find I have the strong arm of the law completely on my side, and I shall set it in motion.”

They were back in Paris when this conversation took place, at the Hôtel d’Or, and their visitors had returned to their magnificent home, the Hôtel de Saison. Madame la Comtesse had waited for a few days to see if her son would himself volunteer to speak about that which she knew must fill his heart; but he was too wise and too wary.

They were in madame’s boudoir—she had sent to her son there—and though it was winter now, near Christmas-tide, the odor of rare and costly flowers filled that beautiful and luxurious room; superb crimson blooms, and madame’s favorite flower in greatest profusion, the fragrant purple heliotrope.

A room that might have been fitted for a queen; the hangings were of rich pale rose velvet and gold; the few pictures were masterpieces; the rich ornaments of silver and gold; a few elegant books and costly knickknacks lay about. In an easy-chair of pale rose velvet sat madame. If she had dressed herself to suit her boudoir she could

not have looked more in harmony with it. She wore a velvet costume of the palest shade of gray, with a few diamonds; very stately and very imperial she looked.

She smiled when her son entered the room, he looked so handsome and so picturesque, so gallant and brave.

"You want me, mother?" he said.

"Yes, my son," she answered; "I want to remind you that the six weeks' truce is ended."

The young count flung himself wearily on one of his mother's dainty chairs. It had to be gone through; the sooner the better.

But what did his mother mean by saying that she had the strong arm of the law on her side, and why was there that gleam of victory on her face?

"You have been so short a time in France, Leon," continued Mme. de Soldana, "that it is not to be expected you would know much of the law."

"I do not, indeed," he replied, laughingly. "That is just about the only thing I have carefully avoided."

"You do not know, then, that the French marriage laws differ considerably from the English."

"No," he replied, "I have never given the matter one single thought."

"You will have to give it very serious thought, now," said madame. "It concerns you far more than you think. In fact, it is a matter of life or death to you."

"I do not see it," said the young count, gravely.

"No, but I will explain it to you," she said, "and if you consult your lawyer in France, you will find that I am right."

He looked at her anxiously, wondering what she had to tell him, but never dreaming—even faintly—what it was.

"You have gone through a ceremony in England which you call marriage," she said.

"I have done so," he replied.

"In France that is no marriage at all," said Madame la Comtesse; "it has not the faintest shadow of validity."

"I cannot believe it," he answered, slowly.

"It is most perfectly correct," said madame. "You have left some person whom you call your wife in England?"

"I have done so," he replied.

"Do you know," she continued, "that so long as that person remains in England she is your wife, but that the moment her foot touches French soil she ceases to be so?"

"I cannot believe it," he cried again.

"It is perfectly true. So stands the law; she is your wife in England, but not in France. Your marriage with her is invalid and illegal in the eyes of the French law. This moment you are perfectly free."

"But, mother," he cried, "it is incredible."

"It is most perfectly true," she replied, coldly.

He sat silent for some minutes, then his face flushed hotly, and he cried:

"You must be mistaken, mother. Such a law would be an infamy."

"I do not deny it," replied madame; "there are many laws that are infamous."

"But how is it?" he cried. "You tell me this thing; but how does it happen? What is the proof? What is the reason? How does the law stand?"

"You must remember," said madame, "that you are *under age*. If it were not so, the law would not touch you; as it is, it does. You have not reached your twenty-first year yet—you are consequently a minor, *under age*. You see that, Leon?"

"I suppose so," he said, haughtily. "You seem so thoroughly conversant with the subject, mother, it is hardly worth while to appeal to me for any confirmation of your own ideas."

"You are a minor," repeated madame, "and, according to the French marriage law, you cannot *legally contract any marriage while you are under age, without the consent of your parents or guardians*. If you marry without their consent, the marriage is perfectly illegal."

"I cannot believe that such a law exists," he said.

"It does exist, and it is in very active force," said Madame la Comtesse. "You will find it so, Leon."

"Do you mean to tell me, mother, that any young fellow of nineteen or twenty who gets married here in

France without his parents' permission is not *legally married?*"

"It is so," replied madame. "Whether the law be just or unjust, it stands so."

"It is impossible!" he cried.

"It is generally the impossible which is true," said madame, calmly. "Of full age, a man may marry whom he will, and his marriage is perfectly legal; even should his parents refuse all sanction and permission, it does not matter, the marriage is perfectly legal; but if the man contracting it be under age, and marries without the formal consent of parents or guardians, such a marriage is not valid, and does not stand in the eyes of the law."

The young count looked bewildered.

"Why does such a law exist, mother?" he asked.

"I should say, for the prevention of imprudent marriages," replied madame, knowing full well that therein she had scored one good point against her adversary.

"How long has it existed?" he asked.

"That I cannot tell you," replied madame, "nor can I see that it matters at all; *the law exists now*—that concerns you. I can make it even clearer to you," she said, emphatically. "You being under age before being married, you should have come to me, written, or sent to me for my permission; without that permission your marriage is null and void."

"But," he said, with some hesitation, "that is not the law in England; no such law exists there."

"No," said madame, "I am well aware of it; that is why I say that the person who is called your wife in England ceases to be so the moment her foot touches French soil. Ridiculous, inconsistent as it seems, suppose that you were bringing that young person to France on the pier at Dover or Folkestone, she would be your wife; on the pier at Calais or Boulogne, she has not the faintest claim to that name, because you have married her without my consent."

"Mother," he cried, earnestly, "I swear to you that I did not know this; I did not, indeed."

"I am sure of it," said madame, gently, "or you

would have written to have asked my consent, which I should at once have refused, and you would not have married without it."

"It is monstrous," he cried. "I wonder that the whole world does not rise in revolt against such a law."

"I think that the law has its advantages," said madame; "when I remember how headstrong and hasty most young men are, I am glad to remember, also, that there is some constraining law over them."

"I should say that it does far more harm than good," cried Leon, hotly.

"And I, that it does more good than harm," said madame.

"But, mother," cried the count, "do you mean to tell me that the same law exists all over Europe? If a young man marries in Italy or Spain, without the sanction of parents or guardians, is his marriage illegal there?"

"It is illegal unless he brings his wife to France and remarries her here, with the needful consent gained."

"It is an iniquitous law," he cried. "It is a law that would help a man to be a villain."

"It is a law that would prevent a man from making a foolish or imprudent marriage," she said.

"I can hardly believe it, repeat it as you will, mother, that such a law exists."

"You are one of the worst-informed men in France, then," she said; "your ignorance is only excusable on the grounds that you have never lived in France and have had no French training."

"If that be French training, I am glad of it," he retorted.

"England has had marriage laws as uncertain, if not as unjust."

"She has repealed them," he said.

"France may repeal hers in time," said Madame la Comtesse; "at present this law exists, and must be respected and obeyed. Evidently you have not made any great study of the English newspapers either," said madame. "I can remember more than one lawsuit that has arisen from it."

"I have never read of them," he said. "I have never

heard the law spoken of, or alluded to. I am perfectly ignorant of it."

"The next thing for us to discuss," said madame, "is how this French law of marriage, as it stands, will affect you."

CHAPTER XXXII.

As Madame la Comtesse uttered these words she looked steadily in her son's face. In the bewilderment of his thoughts, he could not at present see her aim.

"There is no doubt," she said, "but that the attention of legislators of both countries will be called to this law. As it exists, it presses hard upon the young women of other nations; but while it exists, I shall make use of it for my own purposes."

There were threat and menace both in her voice, and her proud face grew pale as she spoke. He looked at her in wonder.

"I do not see what you have to do with law, mother," he said.

Madame smiled.

"I shall have a great deal to do with it," she said. "I shall set it in motion against you."

He smiled.

"You will never do anything against me, or hurt me," he said. "I have implicit faith in you."

"It will not hurt you in the right sense of the word," she replied. "If you saw a child about to swallow a bright-colored poisoned sweet, you would snatch it away."

"Certainly I should," he replied.

"The child would cry and feel hurt, but you would know that you had done a real kindness, and no harm. It will be the same with you: I shall take from you a poisoned sweetmeat; you will cry out that you are hurt, but you will be glad afterward, and own that I did right. Now that I have spoken to you and explained, have you any idea of what my intentions are?"

"Not the faintest," he said; but his eyes were fixed in wonder on her face, and a shade of fear had crept into

them. He wondered that she did not speak more quickly—that she did not tell him at once what she meant. He could not tell that her thoughts were so base and wicked, even she hesitated before expressing them.

“Leon,” said Mme. de Soldana, “your so-called English marriage was a mistake. You will allow that?”

“I will allow this much, mother: it would have been much better if I had written to ask your permission; but I did not know the existence of the law, so never thought of it.”

He could not be completely disloyal to the fair young wife waiting so patiently for him on the banks of Allan Water; he could not be disloyal to all the sweet, passionate love that had been between them.

“If you had written to me a thousand times over I should never have given my consent. If I had not given it, what would you have done?”

“Married without it,” he said.

Madame la Comtesse smiled, a cruelly sardonic smile, but she replied, calmly:

“Then the marriage would have been illegal, as it is now. The children born of such a marriage would not be legitimate; they could not succeed you. You see how ridiculous, in every way, such a marriage would be.”

The young count gave a weary sigh.

“But, mother,” he said, “all arguments as to whether the marriage would be ridiculous or not are vain; the marriage is an accomplished fact, all opposition to it is vain.”

“That is where you mistake,” said madame; “there is no such fact in such a marriage.”

“But, mother, Lima is my wife!” he cried, and this time there was the vehemence of passion in his voice.

“In England, but not in France,” said madame, coolly.

“If you choose to have a wife living in England who can never be your lawful wife in France, you will be the first of the Soldanas to bring a stain upon the name.”

The count sprang to his feet, a bright light shining in his eyes.

“But, mother,” he cried, eagerly, “there is a way to avoid all this! I must bring Lima home to France, and

you must give your permission to my marriage with her."

That was madame's moment of triumph.

"And that permission," she answered, "not even death itself should wring from me!"

He looked at the countess in undisguised horror.

"Do you mean that, mother?" he cried. "Do you mean that you will refuse the permission needful for me to make Lima my wife in the eyes of the French law?"

"That is just what I do mean," she answered, "and is what I intend to do!"

"I will not believe that any law places such power in your hands," he cried.

"The French marriage law, as it stands, does," said madame.

"Then I shall have to live in England with my wife, in order to give her her proper position," he said.

"Even then, in the eyes of the French law, you would not be a married man. Your children would not be the legitimate heirs of the Soldanas."

A gentle sigh broke from his lips, which his mother heard, but it did not touch her. She said to herself that she must be firm, stern, and strong, as the surgeon with the knife.

"I will point out your duty to you," said madame in a low voice, "and mind, I do not want an immediate decision. You can have time to think it over. You need not come to any hurried conclusion about it. Take time. No one can ever give too much thought to any subject, although it is quite possible to give too little. "Leon," she continued, solemnly, "your marriage was a fatal mistake; a terrible, fatal, horrible mistake."

"I will not admit it," he cried. "Mother, what is a man unless he be loyal to his wife? I will not admit that it was a mistake."

Madame smiled calmly, as though she had been discussing the most trivial incident possible.

"That is merely childish obstinacy," she said. "Your marriage is a grave and fatal mistake, Leon. Set it aside. You can do so in all honor, because it is not valid."

"Mother, would you counsel me to make a villain of

myself? How can I set it aside—our marriage is sacred and valid enough in the sight of Heaven."

"Probably," said madame, calmly, "but that has nothing to do with it; your marriage is not sacred or valid in the eyes of the law."

"I would not do such a base, dishonorable deed to save my life," he cried.

"You have something to save which is dearer than life," cried madame—"your name, and the honor of your family."

The count smiled disdainfully.

"They may perish a hundred times over before I save them at that price!" he cried. "Mother, you a woman, a lady, to advise me to do such a thing! I am horrified—I could not have believed it! You ask me to set aside a true marriage, a marriage blessed by Heaven, because an obscure and miserable law happens to be against it. What is human compared to Divine law?"

"You will find this one particular law a very strong one," observed madame, calmly. "If you will listen to reason you will see that I am right, and that if you follow my advice all will go well with you, and you will be able to redeem the error you have fallen into. You must set aside this marriage, which is invalid in the eyes of the law. There is not a mother in France in my position who would not give the same advice to her son."

"I do not believe it!" he cried, "and if it be true, shame on all French mothers!"

His handsome young face flushed with anger. Had it been any other than his mother who spoke those words to him, he would have avenged himself quickly.

"I quite expected that you would be very angry, at first; in fact, you are not quite so angry as I thought you would be."

"I say less, perhaps," he cried angrily, "but I think the more! Listen to me, mother," he continued. "I would rather cut off my right hand than do this thing which you suggest to me; it would be base, dishonorable, and shameful. I will *not* do it!"

"I was quite prepared for that answer," said madame. "You will think differently in time. Let the idea sink

into your mind — that you have to set aside this English marriage, which, in the eyes of the law of your own country, is no marriage at all ; and then you will be free to marry Helene de Saison."

" I am married," he cried, angrily.

" What is the name of this young person in England ? " asked madame, calmly.

He clinched his hands and bit his lips ; he forced himself to keep back the angry words that rose to his lips ; she was his mother and a lady ; he must restrain himself.

" Her name was Lima Derwent before I married her ; now she is my wife, the Comtesse de Soldana."

" A miller's daughter, I think you said ? " continued madame.

Alas, for the sweet green banks of Allan Water ! Alas for the sweet love-story told there, and the fair young wife waiting there now ! He could see the old-fashioned mill, and hear the foaming and churning of the water as it rushed from the mill to the stream ; he could see the miller's face paling with anger when he bade him go. It might have been better had he gone.

He looked into the face of the proudest woman in France, as he answered :

" Yes, she was a miller's daughter."

" I should think myself that settles the question," said madame. " You have made a mistake — now comes your opportunity of undoing it. History does not tell of any Soldana who has married a miller's daughter."

" History may tell much worse, mother," he said.

" Do you think this miller's daughter fit to take her place as mistress of Belle d'Or ? " asked madame.

" No, not yet," he answered, frankly ; " but with your tuition she soon would be," he answered.

" Leon," said madame, " you must be very simple. It is quite useless for you to continue your contest with me ; I *hold the power, and you do not*. The law gives me the power over you until you are of age, and I intend to use it. Better be friends than enemies — better be at peace than at war."

He looked curiously at her.

" Mother," he said, more quietly, " you are a woman

—a lady. You are supposed to have a tender woman's heart; do you really advise me to set aside my marriage, to blight my young wife's life, to mar her fair name, and to break her heart—do you really mean this?"

"I do," she said. "I not only mean it, advise it, but I implore you to do it."

"You do not think it base or unmanly?" he said.

"No, I do not. The honor of the family should be your first consideration. The young person is called Lima, you say. Well, Lima should be provided for, but your duty should be to repair your mistake, and marry Helene de Saison."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LONG hours afterward, when Madame la Comtesse, delighted with what had passed at the interview, and feeling quite sure that she should win in the end, had left the count, he remained thinking more deeply than he had ever done in his life before, or ever would, perhaps, again. Was ever any man in such a dilemma—to have a wife in England and none in France? In England he was a married man; in France, unmarried. He wondered much that he had never heard of this law—that he had never heard any allusions to it in conversation, had never read anything about it—for it was such an extraordinary law; it seemed to him that all the world must be astonished at it.

His mother spoke of it as a matter of course that every one was perfectly familiar with. He realized how painful his position was; nothing could legalize his marriage except that with his mother's formal consent he married Lima over again, in France: that consent she refused, therefore all attempt at such a remarriage would be quite in vain.

"What a position for me—what a position for Lima!" he said over and over again, to himself. "A wife in England—no wife in France. After all—Lord of Belle d'Or as I am, lord of this lordly mansion and of the wealth of the Soldanas—yet Lima is not my wife here.

While I live in France she can be nothing to me ; she cannot be my wife or the mother of my children ; she cannot legally share my name even. I must choose between France and Lima. It seems to me that I cannot have both," and he thought of the summer sunlight hour when Lima had chosen the white lilies of France, and how, according to these laws of France, the white lilies could be hers no more.

On one side was his wife ; he could go back to England and live with her—she was legally his wife there, but her children could not be heirs of his French property ; he would have to give up many of his rights as a French citizen ; he must deprive himself of the pleasure of living on his own domain ; more than all, he must give up those ambitious hopes and daring plans which, if carried out, would make him foremost amongst the men of France ; he must give up all that ; if he went to live in England he must renounce every hope that was dear to him ; still, of course, there was Lima—he would have Lima.

He would not have to live in poverty again ; he could not take his estate with him, he could not take the grand old chateau or beautiful Belle d'Or across the sea, but he could take his income with him ; he need not live in poverty. It would be a terrible wrench, he owned even to himself, to leave France now that he had such fair and bright prospects, but, if he remained in France, without his mother's consent he could not have Lima ; to join her in England, and remain there with her, was ruin to all his hopes, prospects, and desires : to remain in France, and take the place that he wanted, meant that he must live without Lima.

It was a terrible dilemma to him, and he saw no possible way out of it except by winning his mother's consent to his marriage, and that, he saw plainly enough, he should never do.

"I did not know that Divine and human laws ever came into opposition with each other," he said to himself. "In the eyes of Heaven, in the sight of the majesty and justice of Heaven, Lima is my wife ; we were married by a properly ordained minister, in a church, with every

formality. I intended to make her my wife before heaven and man. I married her in accordance with the Divine laws; a human law steps in, looks me in the face, and says, ‘She is *not* your wife; the marriage is not legal. Now, between the two laws, which is my duty?’

Conscience told him his duty was to fulfil that grand old law which says: “A man shall leave all things and cleave unto his wife.”

That must be duty. It was impossible after these solemn vows that made them one, quite impossible, that any human law should override them.

Then a new revelation came to him. It was not so much a matter of setting aside the marriage as it was of the consequences that must ensue if he persisted in treating as legal and valid a marriage which he now knew to be neither; and the consequences that seemed most terrible to him were those that concerned the succession of his estates. He wondered what Lima would say herself, if she knew; what her opinion would be. Conscience and duty both told him that “he must stay with her.” Lima would hold no other opinion than that. That was one side of the question, leaving France and going to England. He could picture to himself how he should eat his own heart away in exile, as it were, once more.

Then, supposing the marriage was set aside, or rather was treated as an invalid one; supposing that he could persuade Lima to do as his mother suggested, accept a comfortable income, and remain where she was, never to trouble him again; suppose that he was quite free to marry Helene de Saison — what then? Should he ever be happy again? Should he ever know peace of mind or happiness? What was he to do? And each time that he asked himself that question, conscience answered him in a loud voice: “Stay with your wife, for she is your wife, notwithstanding the quibble of the law.”

Mme. de Soldana had done a very wise thing in telling him that she would not hear of any quick decision. The wisest thing she could have done was to allow it to sink into his mind.

During the next few days he went about like a man in a dream. He was always thinking about it. The two

paths lay before him quite clear and distinct — either to yield to the French law and leave Lima, or to give up France and cling to her. Madame was too wise to renew the subject; she saw from his face that it had taken deep root in his mind, and she was clever enough to let well alone.

In the meantime she threw everything that was bright and attractive in his way; she took care that no day should pass without his seeing Helene de Saison; and Princess Helene grew more attached to him every day, and from some few words that Mme. de Vesey accidentally uttered, she gathered that there was some idea of an alliance between the two families. Yet, why did he not speak to her? He had lived so long in England that she knew he would woo and win the wife he chose in the English fashion. Of late, she had thought him grave, thoughtful, and preoccupied; he had lost his ease with her, he was more embarrassed when in her society, and Princess Helene did not know whether that was a good sign or a bad one.

In the meantime, the count did not take his mother's word for granted; he consulted some of the most eminent solicitors in France; from one and all he received the same answer: "That, being a minor, his marriage was invalid without his mother's consent;" and that, although the lady in question would be recognized as his wife in England, she would not be so recognized in France. That if children were born to him in England, they would not be considered legitimate in France, and would not be eligible to succeed him. Then what would come of the grand old race of the Soldanas?

No one could suggest any way out of the difficulty; there was none; the way was quite clear before him. He must give up Lima, or give up France with all his newly acquired honors, unless he could win his mother's consent to the marriage — and that was hopeless.

Madame la Comtesse watched him with great anxiety; she placed every temptation in his way; she talked always of the brilliant future that might be his; she talked of the wealth and the beauty of Helene; she kept his mind in a continued state of restless agitation. She

herself saw no harm whatever in it. It might be rather a high-handed proceeding perhaps, but then desperate diseases require desperate remedies. On the only occasion she spoke to him about the matter, after their first conversation, he said to her :

“ Mother, do you really not understand the villainy of the plan you suggest to me ? I grant that your mind has been warped and imbibited by sorrow, still it must be clear enough and bright enough to see that no gentleman could do what you suggest, and that the man who does it must be a villain — does it not strike you in that light ? ”

“ No, Leon, it does not. I look upon you as a gentleman, the head of a noble house, who has, from ignorance and want of experience, placed himself in a most awkward dilemma. I think you ought to be very grateful that there is a hope of rescue for you, even though it be by the law.

“ You see, Leon,” continued madame, “ I have been very patient. Naturally, I wish to see everything settled and arranged ; I want to see you well and happily married ; I want to see all your worldly affairs settled. As things stand now, you could not even make your will. I have been patient, but we must have a little action now. I am patient no longer. I leave matters in your hands for a few days longer, then I shall take them into my own. Do you know what my first step will be ? ”

“ I do not, mother,” he replied. “ A hard one, I have no doubt, since it concerns me.”

“ A hard one, perhaps, but it will cut the Gordian knot for you. I shall appeal to the highest court of justice to set aside your marriage.”

“ You would not do that, mother ? ”

“ I would, and shall,” was the determined reply, “ unless you take some steps at once. Your best plan will be to let your lawyers arrange the whole matter for you, let them be as liberal as they like in the way of money — but they must distinctly understand ; you may have a few days longer to think matters over in, then there must be no further respite. Do you think a wealthy and beautiful heiress like Helene de Saison will not soon be

married? You are letting the prize of your life slip out of your hands."

"Mother," he said, despairingly, "you know that I must not think of Helene de Saison."

"Then you must teach her not to think of you," laughed madame.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

PRINCESS HELENE was in the salon of her beautiful house in the Champs Elysées one morning when the young count called to see her with some commission from his mother. She was pleased enough to see him, and Mme. de Vesey had not hesitated in leaving them *tête-à-tête* for a short time. It was not in accordance with French custom, but "it was not necessary to be so particular" in this case, both being pretty well used to English manners.

The count delivered his mother's message, and then the conversation turned upon the last new novel and the last new play. Suddenly Princess Helene, looking at him, said :

"Monsieur le Comte, have you any idea what a changed man you are? The laughter has all gone from your eyes; you are so grave, so *distract*. We are old friends now—I am sure you will forgive me for asking you if there is anything wrong?"

"Nothing whatever," he answered. "I am most grateful for your interest and kindness."

"Are you well?" she continued, earnestly. "I know that gentlemen, as a rule, object very strongly to acknowledge that they have anything but perfect health; but you do not look well."

"I am perfectly well," he answered, with a low bow.

"Then," she continued, with a frankness that was rather startling, "then you are not happy. Ah, I see that I have reached the right reason at last."

For he started slightly, and the handsome face grew paler.

"You are not happy," she repeated; "trust me, and tell me why."

"I cannot," he replied, "or I would."

But he felt that the best and wisest thing he could do would be to tell his troubles to this girl whom his mother wished him to marry.

If she knew the whole story of Lima and his marriage, she would, as a matter of course, cease to think of him. She might be annoyed to think that the story had been kept from her, but she would most certainly give up all thoughts of him if what his mother said was true, had she entertained any; but he had given his word to Madame la Comtesse, and he shrunk from breaking it.

"Why can you not trust me?" she said, gently, so gently, that he was surprised, and he saw a quiver of emotion on her face.

"It is nothing," he said, hurriedly — "only a trifle, a something that concerns myself —"

"And therefore," she interrupted, "would interest me."

"You are very good," he said, gratefully, feeling more embarrassed than ever. "It is a something that I cannot speak of."

"Tell me," she said, "is it a political trouble?" — she spoke quickly and in a low voice — "that is the one thing I am always anxious over for you," she said.

He smiled half wishing that it were nothing worse than political trouble.

"I am very happy to say that I have no trouble of that kind; on the contrary, I am making my way, as I hoped to do."

"I am glad to hear that," she said, still so gently and kindly that it was difficult to realize it was the haughtiest girl in France who was speaking. "I cannot ask any more questions, and those I have asked have not been dictated by curiosity."

"I am sure of that," he replied, with a low bow.

"I will only say that if you are in trouble of any kind and I can help you I will do any thing I can. You must look upon me as a kind of sister and, come to me."

When a young lady, with love shining in her eyes,

tells a gentleman to "look upon her as a sister," it is not in human nature for the gentleman to fail in understanding something of what is in the lady's mind.

Princess Helene held out a white, jewelled hand, slim, cool, and firm. Count de Soldana raised it to his lips.

"I do not deserve your goodness," he said, and she did not hurriedly withdraw her hand from his clasp. It lay there almost as though she expected him to say more. It was then, for the first time, that the young count felt that Princess Helene cared for him, felt that she loved him, and that, so far his mother was right: it would be in his power to win her.

When he released his clasp of the white, jewelled hand without saying more, he saw the expression of pain that passed like a summer cloud over the beautiful face; she had been so sure that he was going to say some kind or loving words to her, and it flashed across her mind that if he did not speak now, when they were together and alone, when he had so excellent an opportunity, that he would never utter them at all, and that her love was all given to him in vain.

"Promise me one thing," she said, "if any political trouble reaches you, you will tell me at once?"

"I promise," he answered, and then he felt his heart warm to her, not with love, but with kindly, grateful affection. She was so proud, so imperious, that she could not have paid him a greater or more delicate compliment than talking to him in this friendly fashion. His heart warmed to her, and they talked for sometime together. She took from a dainty stand of flowers a lovely little spray of stephanotis and held it out to him.

"Keep it," she said, "in memory of the promise you have made me."

He laughed.

"Favor me, then," he said, "after the English fashion; fasten it here. When young ladies in England give their—their"—then he stopped abruptly, and his face flushed crimson. He was on the point of saying "lovers," but he paused just in time, and substituted the word "brothers."

"When young ladies in England give flowers to their

brothers, they always add grace to the favor by fastening them here," he said.

"I will imitate the English young ladies," said princess Helene, with a bright, pleased smile.

She went nearer to him, and holding the dainty spray of stephanotis in her white fingers, she placed it in the buttonhole of his coat and fastened it there.

She was so near to him that he could feel the slight tremble of her hands, and the faint, subtle perfume that came from the folds of her dress ; her beautiful face was raised to him with a smile ; her eyes, for one moment, looked in to his—only one moment—but while it lasted they told him all that was in her heart, and then her beauty intoxicated him. He bent down and kissed the beautiful, ripe lips, so dangerously near. The next moment it flashed across him what he was doing : he drew back pale and startled. The fair face of his young wife rose before him, sad reproach looking at him out of those beautiful blue eyes. He was startled, as though he had actually seen her, while Princess Helene dropped her proud head with a crimson blush ; her whole heart was filled with delight, and her first thought was—“ We shall never be the same after this—never again.”

He recovered himself quickly, and she looked up at him. She had never been so beautiful ; the blush still lingered on her face, and her eyes smiled into his.

“ Is that an English custom also, Monsieur le Comte ? ” she asked.

“ Between brothers and sisters, most decidedly yes,” he replied. “ I—I ought to beg your pardon, Princess Helene.”

“ I forgive you,” she replied. “ I am inclined to think it is my own fault. I went into danger. Take care of the stephanotis, and remember your promise, comte. Good-morniug, Monsieur le Comte.”

Princess Helene was wise enough to terminate the interview just at the right moment, but the count did not feel very happy as he descended the steps of that magnificent mansion. He was not pleased with himself, but then she had looked so lovely, and he had read that in

her eyes which told him she was not by any means in different to him.

Alas, for the sweet love-story told on the banks of Allan Water! Alas, for truth and for honor!

"If I did the right thing," he said to himself, "if I took the only course open to an honorable man, I should never look upon the face of Princess Helene again." But what a face it was, radiant, beautiful, and proud. How the pride had given place to tenderness when she looked at him; and she had not been angry with him when he kissed her.

The fair sad face of Lima, his wife, faded from him, and this took its place. He could not go home, he felt restless and disturbed; a fire burned in his veins; he was like one haunted with shadows.

He went into the magnificent gardens that lay near, and walked under the shade of the trees. The music of the wind in the trees, the clear sweet voices of the children at play reached him, but above all he could hear the words of the ballad :

"For the summer grief had brought her,
And the soldier false was he ;
On the banks of Allan Water,
None so sad as she."

Was the prophecy in those lines to be carried out? Should he ever be false to that fair and loving young wife, who had given up everything in the world for him?

When he had first asked himself that question his answer had been an indignant, "No" — a thousand times "No."

The answer this time was not so indignant, neither was he so sure of himself, and he recognized the fact. Constant dripping wears even a stone. No man had ever meant to be more loyal, more true, more honorable; the bare idea of any other course of conduct had been loathsome in his eyes. He would not look at it, he would not think of it, but now he found himself looking it straight in the face without much shrinking from it, and looking at the consequences.

That same sun was shining over Allan Water, where

his young wife watched wearily for him, where she prayed and wept, where she lost health and strength and everything in the wide world, but love for him.

CHAPTER XXXV.

HER beautiful face flushed with victory, love-light shining in her eyes, her heart beating with a passion of happiness so great that it was almost pain, Princess Helene paced up and down her magnificent room. She was happy, yet miserable. She was full of hope, yet full of fear. She felt that the young count cared for her; yet if he did, why had he not said so? Why not, when he kissed her, have whispered, "Helene, I love you—will you be my wife?" If he loved her, why had he not done so?

She had given him her whole heart in that one kiss, and Helene de Saison never did anything by halves; she had given him her whole heart, and she could not take it back. Until then she had in some measure tried to control her love—she had hardly owned it even to herself—but now it became suddenly part of her life, and the kiss was still burning on her lips—her heart was still beating with passionate happiness.

"I may say it now to myself, 'I love him—I love him!' and after this we shall never be the same again. He looked in my face and kissed me; he can never be cool or indifferent to me after that—never again. But why did he not say that he loved me? Was there any reason? Surely not. He did not love any one else." She had heard on all sides how insensible he was to all charms of beauty—how little he sought the society of ladies. She knew that he had paid her more attention than he had paid to any one else. It could not possibly be that he cared for any one else. There could be no reason.

"I do not believe," said Princess Helene to herself, with a smile, "that he would have kissed any one else in the world but me."

The white water-lilies that slept on the bosom of Allan Water could have told a different story.

“He was even more frightened than I was. Oh, my love—my brave, handsome love, I shall win you yet. You will tell me that you love me yet, and ask me to be your wife.”

There was a sound of some one entering the room, and Princess Helene turned quickly to see who it was, so quickly that the flush had not died from her face, or the happy light from her eyes.

“My dear Helene,” cried Mme. de Vesey, “how well you look!—how bright, how glad. What is it?”

She, always so proud, so imperious, felt the need of human sympathy now. She went to madame; she laid her arms round her neck, and hid her bright face on her breast.

“I do not know quite what it is,” she said; “perhaps I have been looking at the sun, and it has brought tears to my eyes.”

Mme. de Vesey raised the beautiful face; the long, dark lashes were wet with happy tears.

“I know what it is,” said madame, “but I will not tell.”

She kissed Princess Helene, and resolved that she would speak to Madame la Comtesse even that day.

“I will lose no more time,” she thought. “I have been indiscreet. After all, English manners do not suit France. I should not have allowed those two young people to have seen so much of each other. I am afraid that Helene has grown attached to him, and I know nothing of his sentiments. I must see Madame la Comtesse at once.”

All that day the brightness remained on her face, evening was to make her happier still. One of the finest singers in the world (Mme. Alte) was to make her appearance that night in the grand old opera of “Norma,” and Mme. Alte as Norma was something—so the world said—which *must* be seen. Princess Helene had expressed the greatest desire to hear the opera, and Mme. de Vesey was equally anxious to gratify her.

It was arranged that the two families should go to-

gether. The boxes were at such a premium that they considered themselves fortunate in securing one. The emperor and empress were to be present, and that was sufficient to draw a fashionable crowd. That magnificent opera-house was never more crowded than on that memorable evening. There was never a more superb spectacle. The emperor and empress in the imperial box were surrounded by some of the most beautiful and brilliant women in Paris. The emperor looked well. The lines of care that in after years marked his face so deeply had not appeared. He smiled and talked. The shadow of Sedan was not hanging over him then, and the empress looked imperially beautiful ; there was no shadow on her lovely face. The little prince was safe at home, and the dynasty seemed sure. The empress was superbly dressed, and wore the famous pearl necklace. There were no tears on the diadem, no thorns on the crown she wore that evening ; all was brilliant, bright, and happy. It was a scene never to be forgotten ; the beautiful faces of the ladies — their magnificent dresses, their superb jewels, the charming bouquets formed a brilliant picture ; but the face that drew the most attention was that of Helene de Saison ; it was the most beautiful face there.

Many opera-glasses were directed to that box. Mme. de Vesey looked handsome and picturesque. Mme. la Comtesse de Soldana looked as she always did, the ideal of statuesque grace, but Princess Helene carried the palm. She had never looked so lovely in her life, and it is just possible that she never looked just the same again. Love had softened that grand beauty of hers as it had never been softened before ; even those who admired her most admitted that a certain proud, cold hardness, rather marred her loveliness. It had gone now ; the dark eyes, darker than the velvet leaf of a pansy, were bright with the love-light that shone in them, the lips that were hard at times in their expression of scorn and contempt were sweet with gracious curves and lines.

She was happy, thoroughly happy, and happiness beautifies the face of any girl ; it made hers something wonderful to see. She was dressed with exquisite taste — her favorite color, pale amber, most delicately embroi-

dered with white flowers. She carried a bouquet of stephanotis, which had been sent by the young count.

She loved him with all her heart, and she was going to spend a whole evening with him, listening to beautiful music. Could anything be better? Listening to sweet music with the one you love is perhaps the nearest approach that mortals ever make to Heaven.

Mme. Alte was beautiful as she was gifted; she took the house by storm — the magnificence of her acting and singing was wonderful. At first Princess Helene could not see or hear any one or anything except the wonderful woman before her; her whole being was moved. It was seldom that the proud Princess Helene gave way to any emotion; but to-night the sweet sounds that appealed to her senses, the brilliant scene around her, the passionate love of Norma, her passion of jealousy, touched the very depths of her soul, and her heart softened as nothing but music could ever soften it. That night sealed her fate, and the fate of others. As she sat by his side, looking into the handsome face that was the only face in the world she cared for or loved, she said to herself that she would be his wife or nothing; that the world held nothing else for her; that life could give her nothing if this were withheld.

His wife or nothing! If he never asked her to be his wife she would never marry. If he did not love her, no other man should, and though she spoke no word, all these thoughts were told clearly in her eyes, *and he read them.*

The passionate love of a beautiful woman is the greatest flattery a man can receive, and the count was flattered. The man must have been blind and deaf who could not have read what that beautiful face revealed, and heard what the softened music of that voice told.

As the story before them progressed in its passion, its beauty, and its pain, so did the love grow in her heart.

He turned to her once.

“What would you have done, Princess Helene,” he asked, “had you been in Norma’s place?”

“Just the same as she did,” was the quick reply.

"Have you ever been jealous of any one you loved very much?"

"No, I have never been jealous," she answered. "I do not know what jealousy means, but I begin to understand it. I should say it is even more terrible than love. Have you ever been jealous, Monsieur le Comte?"

He thought of that sweet face and the golden hair, of the beautiful eyes that had never looked with love on any one but him, of the loving heart whose every beat had been for him.

"No," he said, with a grave, tender smile, "I have never been jealous."

"I hope I never shall be," said Princess Helene, with a sudden flash of her dark eyes into his. "Jealousy would make me cruel. Some men, it is said, spare no man in their wrath; I would spare no woman in my jealousy."

"You must love deeply before you can be jealous," he said, slowly.

"I know it," she answered, and again their eyes met; the sweet, sad music floated round them; the story of love and passion, of jealousy and death, went on to the end.

But they were in a world of their own; her beauty, the passion of her love-lit eyes, the sweet wooing of her glances, the tenderness of her voice, the wondrous charm which the complete intoxication of her love threw round her, dazed him. It was not even then in his heart that he loved Lima less—in that hour he had forgotten her; he saw only the beautiful face by his side; he heard only the sweet, seductive tones of that voice which was all sweetness for him.

But when he had left her, when her bright eyes had flashed one farewell glance into his, the old words, with their old, sad burden, came back to him—

"For the summer grief had brought her,
And the soldier false was he;
On the banks of Allan Water
None so sad as she.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

A PROMISE made over running water is doubly binding." As Count de Soldana walked home that evening those words haunted him. He felt that the force of his will was weakening, that the influences brought to bear upon him were too strong for him to resist, and yet, no matter what the law said, was he not doubly bound to that fair young wife of his? Doubly bound: first, because he had taken her from her home and her parents quite against their wish; secondly, because he had pledged his faith over running waters, and the old legend said that faith pledged over running waters was doubly binding. He could remember his own words.

"Swear to me, Lima," he had said, "that nothing shall change you, that nothing shall take you from me, nothing shall induce you to give me up. Promise that you will love me truly and faithfully so long as we both live."

And she had promised. She had kept her promise, while he —

"Who could have dreamed or imagined that, if either were faithless, it would be I?" he thought, and the sound of running waters was in his ears.

That same night Madame la Comtesse was waiting for him, and when he saw the expression of determination on her face he knew that the crisis was at hand. He knew that the hour had come, in which he must choose between France and Lima.

Six weeks ago he would have said, "Lima against all the world, Lima before all the world." A month ago he would have hesitated, equally balanced for and against; but now not even the remembrance of the running waters, or the words of the sweet, sad ballad turned the scale. He had loved Lima with a pure, true love; to-night he was under the influence of passion. He was dazed and bewildered by the beauty and the love of this

prond, young heiress who had never condescended to care for any man before. His mind was full of her when la comtesse sent to say that she wanted to see him in her boudoir.

She still wore the same supero dress and magnificent diamonds that had suited her so well at the opera; she had thrown a white lace shawl over her shoulders, and stood as erect and stately as a queen. The lamps were lighted, and a flood of rosy light filled the beautiful room.

"Come in, Leon," said Madame la Comtesse. "You are late this evening."

"If I had known you wished to see me, I would have hastened," he said; "as it is, I have walked leisurely home."

"I wish to talk to you very gravely and earnestly, Leon," continued madame. "I know it is midnight, but this is the best time for an uninterrupted conversation. You have to decide to-night between the young person you call Lima, and France—France, wealth, honor, glory, and all that life holds dear."

Six weeks ago he would have cried out, "Lima before all," but constant dripping wears away a stone—constant and powerful influence brought to bear upon him had produced its effect.

It is difficult for a man to become a rogue or a villain all at once. If a base deed be placed before an honest man he recoils at once and protests against it; but if the same deed be kept continually before his eyes, and shown in many different lights, he becomes familiar with it, then gradually reconciled to it.

Leon de Soldana was honest and honorable by nature, granting even that that same nature was weak and easily influenced. At first he had rejected his mother's proposal with horror and loathing. He would not allow himself to think of it. Then, little by little, the glittering bait thrown out to him had made its impression; then he dallied with the temptation, and so lost his horror of it. Now he argued both sides with himself, and in a case like this, the man who argues is lost.

"I told you, Leon," said Madame la Comtesse, "that

unless you took some decisive measures yourself, and at once, that I should make my appeal to the High Courts of Justice, and demand that your so-called marriage be set aside as invalid and worthless. You know, of course, that the verdict, in accordance with the law, must be in my favor."

"I am afraid it is so, mother," he answered, slowly. "I have consulted some of the most eminent lawyers here in Paris, and there seems to be no alternative."

"No," said madame, "there is none. I am glad you see it. The end of the trial will be that the law itself separates you from that person; you can never call her your wife here in France, and you know all that you forfeit by going to live with her in England. Trial or no trial, it comes to the same thing in the end. There is but this difference—if you will intrust the affair to me, I will carry it through from beginning to end, and there need be no publicity; no one but your own family lawyers need know anything about it, except, of course, Madame Vesey, who, being a woman of the world, will understand. Let me arrange it for you, and no shadow, no shame, no stain, shall rest on the name of Soldana. I will see that this young person is rightly, kindly, and justly dealt with."

"A promise made over running water is doubly binding," were the words that sounded in his ears, and he raised his hand as though he would push away the person speaking to him. Beautiful blue eyes, so sad and so sweet, are looking into his; he closes his own until the vision shall have passed.

"What I want to lay before you clearly is this," said Madame la Comtesse—"when you know and acknowledge that the verdict will be against you, that it cannot be otherwise, why allow this trial to go on? Why draw the attention of all France to what was simply a piece of boyish folly? Why let the wretched story appear in all the papers, and be the subject of conversation throughout France? What will you gain by it? The end will be the same. You will simply have drawn public attention to the fact that your marriage is not legal, and will cause the young person, Lima, to suffer far more

discomfort than if the matter were dealt with silently and diplomatically."

"Mother," said the young count, looking into the determined face, "do you really intend to proceed with the trial, which I must call infamous?"

"Most decidedly I do," replied madame with a smile; "and every sensible man and woman in France will say that I have done well. Now, Leon, you must decide to-night; will you of your own accord? Seeing that your marriage is invalid, and also would be ruinous if it were valid; seeing that to persist in it, to return to England to live with this person would be utter annihilation and ruin to all your hopes and prospects; seeing all this, and knowing that the law will only make it worse, why not yield at once to the good advice given to you? Leave the matter to your lawyers and to me."

"Oh, my poor young wife!" cried the count, with an outburst of emotion so sincere that even the hard, worldly heart of his mother was touched. "My poor, pretty, loving young wife!" he cried, with something like a sob, and then his mother's heart began to beat in triumph from the very tone of his voice she augured that things were going well for her. She thought that perhaps a little sympathy might not be misplaced just then. There are mothers who lead their sons by sympathy and love to Heaven — there are mothers who do the very reverse.

"I know it is hard, Leon," said madame, and into that wonderful voice of hers she threw a cadence of love and melancholy that made it irresistible. "It is very hard, but you are not the only one in the world who has had to sacrifice himself for the good of his family. Do you think that it was easy for Napoleon to give up his beautiful and beloved Josephine? Yet he did so. If — if the young person you call Lima be really disinterested and noble, she would be the first to insist on your leaving her forever."

He thought of the sweet face and the loving eyes, of the white hands that had clasped his, of the beautiful, sensitive lips that had kissed him, caressed him, praised

him, loved him. Was it possible that she would ever send him away from her?

"A promise made over running waters is doubly binding, mother," he cried. "I honestly believe that if I were to do this thing which you ask me, it would kill her—it would break her heart!"

"That fear need not trouble you," said Madame la Comtesse. "Leave her to me. I will undertake to manage her, to satisfy her; to make her quite content and happy."

"If I do it," said the young count, sadly, "I shall never know another happy moment in my life—never one. I shall feel that I am branded with a guilt greater than that of murder. I shall never hold up my head in the sunlight again."

"My dear Leon," cried madame, "that is all sentimental nonsense, the raving of foolish romance! Napoleon the Great held up his head more proudly than ever after he had married Marie Louise."

"Mother," said the unhappy young man, "you need not point out Napoleon's marriage as a model for me to imitate. People said that he was never happy for one minute afterward."

"People said that King Henry never smiled after his son's death," said madame; "but it does not follow that it is true, because people say it."

"Mother," he said, earnestly, "you were rejoiced when I regained what I may call my patent of nobility."

"I was, my son!" she replied.

"I feel that what you are asking me to do degrades me far more than that same patent of nobility ennobles me."

"The same thing did not degrade Napoleon," she said, calmly; "while a man keeps himself within the letter of the law, he is safe."

How could he deny that? The laws of a nation are supposed to be its safeguard; can any man do better than comply with them?

What answer could he make? Let the lawgivers of a nation be careful and not so frame their laws that compli-

ance with them should be a screen for guilt, and a cover for crime.

The lawgivers of a nation, the men who hold so much in their hands ! How far those laws, some of them, tend to individual crimes, who shall say ?

Before madame dismissed her son that night, he had promised to do what his mother required of him, and had lost his own self-respect forever.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

NEVER was a more diplomatic meeting than that which took place between the two ladies, one of the house of Soldana, and one of the ancient house of Vesey.

Mme. la Comtesse de Soldana knew what she had to say. Mme. Vesey knew what she had to insinuate ; both knew well that they desired most heartily a marriage between the young people.

The conference, which was a most solemn one, took place in madame's boudoir ; in the same room where, by specious and subtle arguments, she had overcome the honorable scruples of her son, and had trodden them under foot—where she had taken from him all insignia of nobility, and robbed him of his last remnant of honor.

There the conference took place. Madame la Comtesse broke the ice by saying how very desirable, in her eyes, an alliance between the two families would be, and Mme. Vesey most cordially agreed with her.

Then it was Mme. Vesey's turn, and she explained that Princess Helene had not been trained exactly after the fashion of French young ladies. She had been left a great heiress at a very early age. She had travelled a great deal ; they had been nearly two years in England, and one in Italy ; the consequence was that she was, in some degree, emancipated. She had far more liberty than fell, as a rule, to the lot of young girls of her age. The consequence of this, madame added, was that she had gone more into society ; she had more her own way, and the result was, madame fancied—she was not sure,

but she fancied—her niece regarded Monsieur le Comte de Soldana with kindly eyes. Madame la Comtesse expressed her delight; no marriage could be more suitable, no marriage could be more delightful, and she gladdened Mme. Vesey's heart by telling her that she knew for a certain fact that this marriage, this alliance between two great and noble families, would give great satisfaction at court.

That was the final seal in Mme. Vesey's opinion; she had an almost superstitious love and reverence for the beautiful empress, and was delighted to hear that she had taken an interest in the marriage of her niece.

Everything was most satisfactory. The Comtesse de Soldana mentioned her son's income, his estates, his honors and dignities; Mme. de Vesey mentioned her niece's fortune, which was so enormous that even Madame la Comtesse wondered, and felt more anxious than ever to bring about the marriage. Mme. Vesey mentioned all the conditions that went with this enormous fortune, and the comtesse saw nothing to object to in any of them. So far all was pleasant, fair sailing, and easy, but Madame la Comtesse knew her duty; she knew that between the heads of the two families there must be perfect confidence, and she had not a very pleasant story to tell.

Comte de Soldana had made one stipulation with his mother, and it was this: that Helene de Saison should not be allowed to remain in ignorance of his story. Perhaps he had some faint hope that when she heard it she would reject his suit; that she would indignantly refuse to take to herself one who in another country was the legitimate husband of another woman. Perhaps he thought that the cry might revolt her—"A wife in England, no wife in France." He made his mother promise that she should be told the whole story, and that the decision should rest with her.

Madame la Comtesse had but little fear. She had read the nature and character of Princess Helene pretty accurately. Still, it was not altogether a pleasant story to tell.

"There is one thing, Madame de Vesey," she said,

“which I should like to mention before we proceed — a foolish entanglement in which my son involved himself when he was in England. Nothing dishonorable ; in fact, it does far more credit to his heart than his head. We are both women of the world ; we both understand that young men are not so careful or so thoughtful as they should be. Happily, the law sets in to avert the consequences of my son’s folly.”

Then she told the story exactly as it happened, and as it was, not disguising one fact, yet making it perfectly clear to her listener that, owing to the state of the marriage law, the girl who was a wife in England was no wife in France ; the marriage which was perfectly legal and valid in England was worthless in France, and Mme. Vesey listened with grave attention.

“What do you think yourself of the situation ?” asked Madame la Comtesse, when the whole history was concluded.

“I think,” said madame, slowly, “that you are quite right in setting this marriage aside. It is really no marriage. It would be utter ruin for your son to persist in it, but as a matter of course, he would have too much sense.”

“Many young men make similar mistakes,” continued Madame la Comtesse. “If he had married an English lady of birth and good connections, it would have been different : I might in that case have given permission for the ceremony to have been repeated here with my formal sanction and permission. You see, Madame Vesey,” she continued, “that I have my son entirely in my power. Though he is really the head of the house, the restoration was virtually made to me until he comes of age. I think, under all the circumstances, I am doing right, doing what is best for him.”

“Undoubtedly you are,” said Mme. Vesey. Still she looked grave and anxious.

“You have some doubt on your mind,” said the countess ; tell me what it is ?”

“Did your son love this young person ?” asked Mme. Vesey ; “love her and woo her after the English fashion ?”

"I should imagine so," replied madame. "He must have been what people absurdly call in love with her, or he never would have gone through the marriage ceremony illegal as it was, with her."

"If I understand my niece rightly," said Mme. Vesey, "that would be her chief objection; she has sense enough to see that there is no alternative for the count but to forget all about what he honestly thought at the time was a legal marriage. I myself," continued Mme. Vesey, "although I have lived all my life in France, and have always known of this law as I know of others, I have never realized it; until now I have never been brought face to face with it. I see both the good and the evil of it. I must say that I think it presses hardly on the women of other nations. I believe my niece, if I understand her rightly, would take less notice of the fact of the marriage than of the fact that he loved the girl, and the reason of that is because she herself loves him. She is peculiar, she has strong characteristics. I have always advised her to keep clear of all love and romance. In this case, my advice has been in vain. She will brook no divided love, no half heart. She will have all or nothing."

"I may say that she will have all," said Madame la Comtesse, thoughtfully. "My son thinks that he loves, or has loved, this young girl; I do not think so. See how long he has been here in France, and he has made no effort whatever to see her. I do not believe that he loves her, while I think that he is quite carried away by the beauty, the wit, and the charm of Mademoiselle de Saison."

And so the conversation continued; as women of the world, accustomed to the ways and fashions of the aristocracy, they knew well that in the settlement of a young noble man's marriage the broken hearts of one or two women were not reckoned a feather's weight. "Things of the kind were always happening. There was the young Marquis de Poldaic; he began life very young, travelled half over the world, and married a beautiful Cuban. He took her home to Paris, there his parents took proceedings against him, the marriage was

declared null and void — in very truth, she was no wife of his when once they reached the French shore. He was formally announced as about to marry Minette de Pierrefonds, and the beautiful Cuban threw a bottle of vitrol at him, and blinded him for life."

Mme. Vesey remembered, too, that a few years ago all France had rung with the story of M. le Duc de Mirema, who, while he was a minor, married the most beautiful and accomplished singer of the day — Signorina Pardi — and when, two years afterward, he tired of her and conceived a violent affection for Mme. de Campolle, he had no trouble, nothing to do but to plead the illegality of his marriage, which the law at once admitted, and he married madame.

"Those are not very cheerful incidents," said Madame la Comtesse ; "I hope our affair will not end so badly."

"There is no fear," said Mme. Vesey. "You know nothing of this young English person, Madame la Comtesse ?"

"Nothing, except that, as a matter of course, she is as beautiful as an angel, according to my son — most of those young English girls are pretty! — and she is a miller's daughter."

"A miller's daughter!" cried Mme. Vesey. "What a mistake for Monsieur le Comte to make. How could he, a Soldana, think of such a marriage?"

"He was poor and in exile, without any thought of return in those days," said Madame la Comtesse.

"I think it is an excellent thing for you, Madame la Comtesse, that the law is on your side," said Mme. Vesey ; "you could never have tolerated such a *mésalliance* as that."

"Never," said Mme. de Soldana, proudly. What was one girl's heart compared to the glories of the house of Soldana! Then they talked for a few minutes on what could be done over Mlle. de Saison.

"She is very jealous by nature," said Mme. Vesey. "My opinion of her is that she would overlook any and every thing except the fact of his having *loved* the girl."

"In that case," said Madame la Comtesse, "would it not be best for *me* to speak to her and tell her how the

matter stands? My son wishes her to know the story, and he leaves the decision in her hands. If, knowing it, she will accept his devotion and share his name, he will be the happiest of men. If, knowing it, she refuses, he will, as he must, abide by her decision, and he will be of all men the most miserable. I think," added Madame la Comtesse, "she will accept him." But madame shook her head gravely.

"If he *loved* the other one, I cannot say," she replied. "My niece is jealous, and jealousy is a passion."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MADAME LA COMTESSE knew that she had the most difficult of her many difficult tasks before her. She understood the character of Mlle. de Saison to a nicety. She knew also that she was deeply in love with her son. If she could tell this story of the marriage so as to impress mademoiselle with the idea that it was the English girl who loved her son, rather than her son who loved the girl; if she could leave upon the mind of the heiress the impression that she was the comte's first and dearest love, all would be well. If not the alliance which she so much courted would never take place.

So that, after all, after all her fears and anxieties, the matter really remained in her own hands now.

Madame la Comtesse was not deceitful by nature, nor was she addicted to untruth. As a rule she was honest in the expression of her thoughts and ideas; but this case seemed to her so desperate, there was so much at stake, that she did not think a misrepresentation of the facts would be of any harm; not that she intended so much to misrepresent them as to give to them the needful shape and coloring. To paint her son, not as an ardent lover, wooing and winning a young and innocent girl as his wife; to paint him as the victim of a mistake; to represent him rather as having been entangled in a moment of weakness—of having gone through a ceremony which was valid in England but not in France,

and then finding out that this same ceremony was worthless. That in France and in the eyes of the law this so-called marriage could never be a marriage, and that on his finding out the unalterable truth of this he was willing to do the best he could to provide suitably for the young person, to repair his most hasty and terrible mistake, and that if she could overlook this he begged to place his heart and his life at her feet.

If she were clever enough to tell her story in that fashion, she might succeed; if not, if the beautiful heiress were angry or jealous, then all hopes of the great *De Saison* alliance were ended.

“My tact and diplomacy never have failed me,” she said to herself. “Surely they will come to the rescue now.”

“Princess Helene”—for the pretty name that the count had given to her became a household word; Madame la Comtesse always used it, Mme. Vesey used it, the young count hardly recognized her by any other name—Princess Helene woke up on the morning of the day on which her conversation with madame was to take place with a feeling that some crisis in her life had arrived.

It was noon when Mme. de Soldana reached the *Hôtel Saison*, and she found the young heiress alone. Mme. Vesey had discreetly driven out to keep a business engagement made, she said, some days since. Princess Helene looked very lonely and very magnificent. She was in her own boudoir, a cheerful and beautiful room that looked over the Champs Elysées, a room that seemed to be all pictures and flowers; the hangings were all of Princess Helene’s favorite color—pale amber, with finest white lace. Most of the flowers were of deep crimson or of dead white, so that the coloring of the whole room was delightful.

Contrary to the regular custom, there was a small silver grate in the room, and a bright fire burned there. Princess Helene had drawn her easy-chair near it; a charming picture she presented: the prettily embroidered slipper resting on a footstool of pale amber velvet with golden tassels, her dress of rich white silk loosely fastened with a golden cord and showing every line of her beauti-

ful figure, her dark hair loosened, and her face flushed into loveliest bloom.

Madame la Comtesse looked at her feet for half a minute in silent admiration. She felt that she could do anything to secure the magnificent young creature as her son's wife. It was a pleasant picture to see the two ladies meet, to see how the younger one rose, blushing and radiant with delight, while the older one folded her in her arms, and kissed her face.

"This is the day of all days to me," said Madame la Comtesse, when they were seated side by side. "I have come to tell a story, to ask a grace, to plead for one who just now cannot plead for himself."

The beautiful face grew brighter as she spoke.

Was it possible that the time she had longed for had come, but that instead of being wooed in English fashion, Madame la Comtesse had come in French fashion to ask her hand for her son? Her heart beat, her eyes grew brighter. She was more lovely in the confusion of that moment than Madame la Comtesse had ever seen her before. Her son must win this magnificent creature, and she must do her best to help him. She did not know how easy her task would be, for Princess Helene had given to Count Soldana the whole passionate love of her heart. As Mme. Vesey had said of her, she was for all or nothing. She had not given to him a kindly affection, a mere passing fancy, a love that would die in a few years; she had given to him the whole passionate love of a passionate nature. It was hardly possible, hardly probable, that the mother would plead in vain for the son so dearly loved.

"I have come," said Madame la Comtesse, "as my son's embassadress;" and then Princess Helene gave a great sigh of unutterable relief and content.

"I have a story to tell you, Belle Helene," she said, "and the story is of my son. Will you listen to me?"

"I shall be deeply interested," she replied.

"I know," continued Madame la Comtesse, "that this is an unusual proceeding, and that it is a most unusual thing to tell such a story as this to a young lady; but I know, also, that you have had a far more liberal training

than falls to the lot of most young ladies, and you know more of the world ; besides which, my son wished me to tell you, as he leaves your decision and his fate in your hands."

Then the proud, beautiful face grew paler, and the dark eyes troubled.

"Is it of your son, of Monsieur le Comte, you wish to tell me ?" she asked.

"Yes, it is an accident in his life that you must know."

"But why did he not tell me himself ?" asked the girl.

"He thought it better left to me," replied Mme. de Soldana, "and he had good reasons for it."

And then, delicately, cleverly, subtly, she told the story. In her recital of it, there was not one word that could have shocked even a child. She painted a picture that was marvellous even to herself. She described the dreariness, the darkness of his exile, then how this young English person had brightened and cheered it, had made her way to his confidence, had entangled him—she could find no other word — had succeeded in inveigling him into a marriage that was really no marriage, because it was invalid in France—a perfectly useless and illegitimate ceremony ; and then Princess Helene raised her dark eyes.

"Can there be," she asked, "such a law as that ?"

"Yes," answered madame ; "it is the law of the land."

"Of this fair land of France ?" cried the girl.

"Yes, it is the law, pure and simple, just as it stands," replied madame.

"I did not know," said Princess Helene, "but then I have never heard anything about the law—how should I ? If I may say what I think about it, I—I hardly think that law is fair ; but I will not interrupt you, madame."

Madame la Comtesse went on with her picture, and it grew under her hands. How delicate and subtle the colors, how well blended ; and how picturesque was the picture of the young count as it stood out from the canvas, clear and distinct.

This was no weak-minded young man who knew what

was right, but had not the courage to do it; this was a handsome, melancholy young prince, with whom a miller's daughter fell in love, as fair Elaine fell in love with Sir Lancelot—only in this case the miller's daughter had prevailed, and had inveigled him into some kind of ceremony—a marriage valid, Madame la Comtesse, admitted, in England, but not in France.

A chivalrous young prince, who saw plainly enough that he had made a terrible mistake in making an invalid marriage—a marriage that he desired to retrieve in as noble a manner as possible, without harm or injury to any one, and in the most honorable fashion. So under madame's skillful fingers, the picture grew and grew until Princess Helene began to like it. Then came the final touches of how he had returned home, had found out his mistake in every way, and had fallen in love with Princess Helene.

"My son," continued the clever, skillful woman, who swayed people by force of her own talent—"my son would not conceal one word of this from you. I need not remind you, Belle Helene, that what has happened to him in England would not in the least interfere with the legality and validity of the marriage here in France."

"But," asked Princess Helene, with an earnest expression in her dark eyes, "is there no way of making this marriage of his right, if—if he desires it?"

"He does not desire it!" cried madame, eagerly, "and the only way in which it could be made right would be by repeating the ceremony with my formal sanction which, as I have said, I would rather die than give. It was a boyish folly. Help him, Princess Helene, to redeem himself from the effects of it. He will never love, never marry, unless he marries you. Do not let this boyish folly stand between you; forgive him for it; he did not know you in those days. Will you forgive and forget this disagreeable incident in his career, and marry him, Princess Helene?" Tears shone in madame's eyes as she spoke, and her proud face quivered with emotion. "Will you," she repeated, eagerly, "try to love him, and promise to be his wife, Belle Helene?"

The girl was silent for a few moments.

"I should like to have time to think," she said. "I cannot answer such an important question in a few moments."

"What message shall I take to my son?" asked madame.

"Tell Monsieur le Comte that I send him my dear love; that I will think over my answer, and that, if it be 'Yes,' when I meet him to-morrow evening at the ball of the British Embassy I shall wear a spray of stephanotis in my dress."

And with that message madame went.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

ALL the instincts of her race—all the passionate love of her heart, were in his favor, yet Princess Helene hesitated for a few hours. She had the usual lofty patrician ideas that those belonging to the lower classes were not quite of the same creation as herself. If the same story had been told to her of one of her own class of life, she would have hesitated much longer; but the miller's daughter!—the claims of such a person could not by any possibility be worthy of consideration; there could be nothing in them; they were not worth a thought.

She had the true aristocratic impulse of insolence and contempt for the lower classes which had descended to her from long generations—from the time when the rights of the seigneur over the peasant were cruel, wicked, and barbarous—when the great lords of rich domains were allowed to carry off the wives and daughters of their unfortunate dependents; the same instinct was in the heart of this young girl now.

One of the lower class stood in her way—let her be swept out of it; the law was in favor of so sweeping her out—let the law take its course. The picture madame had so skillfully painted was still in her mind—the handsome, romantic, melancholy young prince in his dreary exile, and the low-born English girl who had taken advantage

of it to thrust herself upon him and to inveigle him into what she supposed to be a marriage.

It was strange that in the heart of Princess Helene there was no pity, no compassion for the girl whose claims were to be so lightly set aside. No kind or pitiful thought entered her mind concerning her, a low-born English girl, who had dared to raise her ambitious eyes to the heir of the Soldanas. She would deserve all that she was about to receive; she merited the punishment that the law would give her — a miller's daughter to love the heir of the Soldanas! And she said to herself, with an air of unutterable contempt, that she knew what English girls could be when they liked, and no doubt this one had been bold and forward in her advances to him.

She must have been — she a miller's daughter, he the heir of all the Soldanas. No doubt his handsome face and princely bearing attracted her, and she had made advances to him. It was easier to believe that, or anything else, than to believe that the Comte de Soldana had fallen in love with a girl of low birth — a miller's daughter; and Princess Helene smiled contemptuously as she remembered what the low type of English girls was like — very red cheeks and freckles, red sunburned hands. Surely the heir of the Soldanas had never loved one such as these! It was merely an adventure, a folly, such as most men had in their lives, to be forgotten, especially as the law was against it.

His mother, at his request, had asked her to overlook it, to forgive it, to forget it, to help him out of the dilemma, and she was willing to do so. She looked upon it rather as an act of justice. He had been drawn into it, and now the law was helping him out of it, and she must help him too. To Princess Helene it seemed that what was the law of her country must be right. It was a strange state of things; but as it existed, there was no more to be said about it.

Princess Helene had never given much thought to the lower class; she lived in her fashion, haughtily unconscious of them; that they could have the same feelings, the same emotions, the same love, the same pain as herself never crossed her mind; she had a lofty fashion of

thinking of them as of some inferior kind of creation, born to their fate, and enabled to endure it very cheerfully because their very natures were blunted to all more refined and sensitive feelings. She had never troubled herself in the least over them ; she had never thought of their wants or their cares. She had never soothed a weeping woman or a sorrowful child ; she had never fed the hungry, or visited the sick. As she was the head of a great race, certain large sums were given every year in her name for charitable purposes, and when the nation gave, her name was always foremost in the list ; but she knew nothing of it ; she had no personal interest in it. So now, when she came to think over the great question of her life, the feelings, the pain, the sorrow of one of that class of which she knew nothing did not affect her in the least, she did not even take them into consideration. That was no part of the difficulty ; an invalid, illegal marriage with a low-born English girl ought to be set aside. With her the difficulty was—had the count loved her ?

All the warm passion latent in her nature seemed to flame into life at the bare thought. If he had loved her ; if she had been the first and dearest love of his life, then the Princess Helene would have none of him. She would never share his love—never succeed to the love of another.

But his mother had told her it was not so—he had not loved the miller's daughter—it was only a common, kindly affection, born of gratitude that he had for her, but that his love lay at her feet ; she had but to stoop and take it.

“ How I should hate her,” thought Princess Helene, “ if I thought he had loved her.”

She thought it well over ; she wished it had been otherwise, and that this incident in the life of the man she loved had never happened, but, since it had taken place the only thing was to do the best possible thing under the circumstances, and the best thing was for the law to take its course, and for her to help the count out of his dilemma, as his mother had prayed her to do.

But the one fact that caused her decision was her

great love for the count. She was almost unconscious herself how great that love was ; she was equally unconscious of how much she was willing to give up for it.

She was thoughtful enough all day, but when evening came she said to her maid :

“ What flowers have I to wear to-night, Finette ? ”

And the maid’s answer was that, with her dress of white and gold, so cunningly intermixed no one could tell where the white began and the gold ended, there were flowers of a rich crimson bloom.

“ Take them away,” says Princess Helene ; “ I will wear nothing but stephanotis to-night.”

When she entered the ball-room, she wore a spray of the queenly flower, with its grand perfume, in the bodice of her dress.

Madame de Soldana saw it at once, and her heart beat with triumph. She had won ; her son would marry the great heiress. She saw, with the eye of her mind, untold glories opening out for the Soldanas, and her son would have for his true wife the most beautiful girl and the greatest heiress in France. She went at once to her son.

“ Leon,” she said, “ I am grateful and thankful Princess Helene is here ; and, my dear, bend your head when you remember the message she sent you—that if she consented, after hearing your story, to become your wife, she would wear a spray of stephanotis. *‘ Leon, it is there ! ’* ”

The young count’s handsome face grew ghastly white — he trembled like a leaf in the wind. No criminal condemned to rack ever felt worse. His self-respect had died on the night when Mme. Soldana had, as it were, extorted his promise ; but now all sense of honor seemed to die also.

“ Courage, Leon,” said madame ; “ *noblesse oblige !* ”

“ Do not add satire, mother,” he cried. “ *Noblesse oblige* can never more apply to me. I have lost all claim to nobility forever.”

“ Leon,” said madame, “ I begin to think you are weak of character, and that is what no Soldana has ever been before you. You have made up your mind to a certain

course ; go on boldly with it ; what is the use of looking back ? I maintain that you are acting rightly, that you are doing what is best for the honor of your race and the glory of your house ; therefore, I repeat, go on boldly. If you feel that you are not doing what is right, draw back *if you can*, but which ever course you pursue be manly over it. I hate to see you with a white face and trembling limbs. I hate to see you nervous and frightened like a woman."

His face flushed hotly under the spur of her words.

"I wish," he cried, bitterly, "that I were a better man or a worse. If I were better I should not do this deed at all ; I should prefer poverty and exile to dishonor. If I were worse than I am, I should feel more comfortable in doing what I feel to be wrong."

"Think of the future that lies before you," said madame. "That spray of stephanotis opens out to you such a future as no other man in France can command. Courage, Leon ; it will never do to show the white feather now."

"I have no such thought," he replied. "I remember all you have said, mother, and I will go to Princess Helene in a few minutes."

Then his face grew deadly white again.

"Are you ill, Leon ?" asked madame.

"No," he replied. "I am not ill, but I have a strange sound in my ears, and my brain is whirling."

Looking at him, madame saw in that moment he was not fit to go to the young heiress. He must recover himself. He knew the sound in his ears was the rushing of the water ; he was looking at a fair, sweet face full of love for him. He was holding a thin, white hand in his own, and he was saying, "Remember, Lima, that a promise given over running water is doubly binding." Oh, mockery of words — mockery of love — mockery of the vows that he was first to break.

That pitiless rush of running water seemed to fill his brain. He could hear it above all the music of the band, while Princess Helene wondered that he had not sought her, and Madame de Soldana began to wonder what she should do,

"Leon," she said, sharply, "you must be mad. Rouse yourself. Mademoiselle de Saison is waiting for you. What are you thinking of? Why do you not go to her?"

And as he crossed the ball-room, the face of Lima, his wife, went with him, with sweet, sad reproach in the blue eyes, and even as he drew near the princess he wished that he were dead.

CHAPTER XL.

A BEAUTIFUL face—the more beautiful for its blushes—was looking into his; dark eyes, bright with love, drooped from his; a white, jewelled hand detached the spray of stephanotis from her dress, and held it out to him with a few murmured words that he could not hear.

He must beat back with an iron hand these memories that seemed to stifle him—the broad sheet of Allan Water; the green banks; his wife's sweet face and sweet voice singing so clearly:

"For the summer grief had brought her,
And the soldier false was he;
On the banks of Allan Water
None so sad as she."

He must beat them back. It was all over with the sweet romance of Allan Water. He was wooing a princess now, and he was to be one of the foremost men in France. Good-by to the fair, sweet face he had kissed a thousand times; good-by to the beautiful lips that had borne the sweetness of honey for him; good-by to the lovely eyes that always brightened for him, but into which he should look never more. Here was a princess to woo, a proud, beautiful lady, whose rich dress fell like sunbeams around her, and who held out to him the token that she loved him, the spray of stephanotis. Farewell to all dreams of Allan Water and Allan Mill—this is a new life beginning, a princess to woo and a future to make.

If Lima would but cease to pull at his heart-strings! It was necessity, he *must* leave her: the law commanded

him to give her up. If he could but forget her for this half hour, at least, while he wooed the princess.

With an iron hand he crushed it down. He bent over the Princess Helene and took the flower from her hand.

"How am I to thank you?" he said. "You are the most generous as you are the most noble of women."

The dark eyes flashed into his with a light that seemed to reach and penetrate his soul.

"Are you pleased?" she asked, simply.

"I am more than that," he answered. "How shall I thank you?"

"Do you wish to thank me?" she whispered.

"With all my heart," he answered.

"We will go through the galleries," she said; "there are pictures I long to see."

But, in spite of her longing, Princess Helene saw none of the magnificent pictures hanging in the galleries that evening—not one.

The galleries were brilliantly lighted, and filled with flowers; there were pretty recesses amongst them.

"I will rest here," said Princess Helene.

A beautiful woman, surrounded by flowers, rich blooms and rich perfumes all around her—a proud face softened into marvellous beauty by love—dark eyes that sought his laden with the secret she had to tell—a white neck, on which the gleaming diamonds rose and fell—a smiling grace and tenderness that, coming from one so proud and haughty, were doubly charming; all this drew his attention and compelled him to admire her.

"You want to thank me," she said, and the voice that uttered the words was sweet as the wind that blows over fresh orange-blossoms. "Thank me now."

He raised her hand to his lips and kissed it.

"I shall think of you every moment of my life," he said.

Then he muttered an oath between his closed teeth; for there it was again—the rush of the running water, and the clear voice raised above it! Would the sound never die from his ear? For one single half hour, while he wooed the princess, could he not forget?

"Your mother gave you my message?" she said.

"And you see you have the stephanotis. But," she added looking into the handsome, agitated face, "why did you not tell me that story yourself?"

"I could not," he replied.

"Were you afraid that it would prove a barrier between us?" she asked.

He hated himself as he answered, "Yes, I was afraid."

"You need not have been," she replied. "I understand, and I think you are acting wisely. I should like to ask you one more question, if I may?"

"Ask what you will, Princess Helene," he answered.

"I should like to know if you loved her—I mean after the English fashion, where a man marries for love. Did you love her?"

He hated himself as he answered, "I would rather not speak of it, Princess Helene."

"But I wish to know. I have had my dreams of the man I should like to love and marry. First and foremost, his love must be all my own. I should not like the second part and place in his affections. Did you love her?"

He hated himself still more as he answered, slowly, "It was a boyish infatuation, and I was so terribly alone."

"Yes, you must have been. I understand how it was; Madame la Comtesse told me. You have my truest sympathy. That was the greatest barrier in my mind. I could never be second in the heart of the man I loved and married."

"You would not be second in mine," he said.

He owned to himself, with bitter contempt, as he spoke, that he could fall no lower—sink no lower in his own esteem, and his mother had used these words, *noblesse oblige*, to him. The light grew brighter on that beautiful face.

"I am a French girl," she said. "All my sympathy, all my feeling, all my love is for France; but no one dislikes the French system of love and marriage more than I do. I do not think it conduces to happiness or to the well-being of society. Since I was old enough to think of such things at all," continued Princess Helene, "I

have always resolved not to marry for wealth, or position, but for—”

Then her voice faltered.

“But for what?” asked the young count, bending over her.

“For love,” she answered.

That was the supreme moment of her life. She spoke out clearly and well. There was no hesitation in her voice. She loved him, and he might know it.

“Then,” he said, looking into the dark eyes, “I may infer from that, Princess Helene, that you—”

He paused, hardly daring to utter the words.

“That I love you,” she said, gently. “Yes, Monsieur le Comte, it is simply and perfectly true that I love you.”

She seemed to gain courage as she went on.

“I have been proud and unyielding all my life,” she said, “and I never thought that such words would fall easily from my lips, but I love you with all my heart.”

She expected some transport of gratitude, some few words of delight, but the face into which she looked was as the face of the dead.

For he had ground another smothered oath between his teeth. He had not been able to hear what she said, for his ears were filled with the rush of running waters and the singing of a sweet, sad voice.

“On the banks of Allan Water
None so sad as she.”

“I love you,” repeated Princess Helene, “and I am willing to place the happiness of my whole life in your hands.”

“You shall never regret it,” he answered. To have saved his life he could have found nothing else to say.

A wave of memory swept over him of the passionate wooing on the banks of Allan Water, of the passionate kisses he had given to Lima when they were in the boat afloat among the water-lilies. It was a different matter wooing a princess.

A wistful expression crept into her dark eyes, and he saw it. It touched his heart more than all her loving

words had done, for she, this great and beautiful heiress, loved him.

"You shall never regret it," he said, speaking more warmly, and taking in his own the hand that had given him the spray of stephanotis. "I will devote myself to making you happy."

Then all her pride and hauteur seemed to fall from her like a garment. She was no longer Princess Helene, she was no longer the great heiress and beauty at whose feet the hearts of so many men lay; she became a simple, loving girl, whose passionate heart found vent in simple words—simple and true—as Lima herself would.

"I shall be happy with you," she said. "I will tell you now what has been a secret in my own heart until now. I have always cared for you, and loved you, from the first moment I saw you."

"You make me the proudest and happiest of men!" he cried; but, do as he would, do the best he could, he could not speak with any enthusiasm. Wooing a princess was a very different thing from wooing Lima on the banks of Allan Water.

She looked at him with eyes so full of faith and trust that his heart ached.

"I am very happy," she said, gently. "I have wondered often since I saw you—first, if your heart would ever turn to me? I am glad it has done so. I am glad and happy that you love me—for you *do* love me—do you not?"

He had not one moment to wait; if he had hesitated, he would have said no, and so lost all. He answered as quickly as he could speak:

"Yes, I love you, Princess Helene."

A smile of anutterable content parted her lips.

"I am happy," she murmured, gently. "I am the happiest girl that lives on earth. And you do not—you never did love her?"

"A boyish fancy," he answered. He dared not to say that he had never loved her; it seemed to him almost as though the utterance of such words must strike him dead.

"I think," said Princess Helene, "that we have a long

and happy life before us, with brighter prospects than fall to the lot of most people."

"I shall have you to thank for all that is most pleasant in mine," he said.

"And I shall have you to thank for all that is happiest in mine," said Princess Helene.

Then he admired the beauty of the white hand he still held clasped in his own ; he kissed it, and then the wondrous beauty of the face struck him as it had never done before. Then came a moment when, in answer to something that Princess Helene said, he kissed the proud lips, and then it seemed as if she gave her heart, her love, and her life to him for evermore.

CHAPTER XLI.

WHEN that brilliant ball had ended, when he had placed Princess Helene in her carriage, her dark eyes looking a tender "good-night" into his, her hand still warm with the clasp of his, he said to himself that he was the most miserable man in the wide world, for he had done the most shameful deed in it, and he had always been so proud of himself as an honorable man.

True that he had acted in accordance with the law, and with the spirit of the law ; true that many others had done the same thing ; true that he had read, since his mother called his attention to them, the histories of several lawsuits wherein minors like himself had contracted marriages, which said marriages had been set aside in every case as invalid and illegal. Notwithstanding all that, he felt on himself the brand of villainy.

And yet, he asked himself, how few could have resisted such a temptation ? On the one side—France, his fair domains, his titles, honors, wealth, and the brilliant prospects that his marriage with Princess Helene opened out to him — compliance with the law, his mother's happiness, the glory and honor of his race ; on the other — poverty, the extinction of his family, exile and Lima.

A terrible temptation ! And the law was on his side.

Had he been a bad man, deliberately plotting how he could ruin an innocent girl, how he could betray and desert her, it would have been a different matter; but it was the very law of his own land that made his marriage invalid, and compelled him, for position's sake, to leave her.

He said to himself that it was hardly to be called yielding to a temptation, but rather to a necessity. He could not rest, and he could not sleep. Far into the night madame heard him pacing his room with restless footsteps, and when she could bear it no longer she went to him.

"Leon, my son," she said, "let me come in. I cannot sleep, because I know that you are unhappy. Let me come in and talk to you."

He unfastened the door, and madame entered his room. A cry of pain and wonder rose to her lips when her eyes fell on the face of her son, so white, worn and haggard.

"Leon," she cried, "you are suffering."

He laughed with bitter contempt.

"Yes, mother," he replied. "I suffer greatly. It is not natural that the best part of a man should die without it, and I may say that the best part of me has died by inches."

"Sentiment, Leon," said madame, quietly. "When you lose a little more of that you will be all right," but she could not affect to remain insensible to the pain she read in his face.

"What can I do to help you, Leon?" she asked. "I know, of course, that you must suffer. Decide which way you will, you cannot escape pain. Can I help you? —can I do anything that will comfort or console you?"

"No," he replied. "I do not see how you can help me, mother — no one can. I must bear my weight of shame and sorrow alone — until I die."

"Perhaps," said madame, half scornfully, "you would rather give up all the wealth and privileges that you were so delighted to regain, and return to exile and what you are pleased to call love?"

"No," he replied, bitterly; I am not insincere. Frankly speaking, I have not the courage to give up my

present life and return to exile. I could not do it, mother—now."

Madame's face beamed with delight. This was indeed triumph. To hear him say these words was to her proof complete of how perfect her triumph was. She could afford to be kind and sympathetic, now that the victory was won.

"I can help you in one way," she said. "Leave the management of this affair in my hands. I will settle it all for you. I know you are agitated by the thought of disagreeable scenes. You shall be spared them. Leave all to me."

"I do not know which will be most cruel," he said: "to tell her myself, or leave it to you. Oh, Lima, my loving, gentle darling, that it should have come to this!"

"I think," said madame, "it would be much better to leave it to me. I could say many things for you that you cannot say for yourself. You would be easily influenced—easily worked upon; I should not. However painful the scenes that come before me, I shall have strength of mind to go through them, because I shall keep that one thought of the Soldanas before my eyes."

"Honor—that has no longer any existence," he said, mournfully. "That is a phrase which all my life I shall dislike and dread to hear. The honor of the Soldanas, and I, the last of the race—what am I?"

"The noblest Roman of them all," quoted madame, with a smile. "Not the least of them all, by any means, because you have had the courage to make a grand sacrifice."

"I have sacrificed Lima," he said, sadly. "I do not know what to do—how to proceed. I am married in England, according to the English law. I have a wife there. Yet I am engaged to marry Princess Helene. There never was, never could be, a more humiliating situation."

"It will all come right in the end," said madame. "A little patience, a little courage, and all will be well. I must help you, Leon. I have been thinking it over. I will go to England for you, and settle what is, I own, a very unpleasant piece of business. There need be no

lawsuit, no exposure, no publicity, no scandal. I will go to see her, and tell her exactly how the matter stands. If she has any sense at all, she will listen to me and follow out my suggestions."

Count de Soldana looked at his mother in wonder; he could not fancy her talking to Lima, or standing by the banks of Allan Water, or watching the blue pigeons fly over the red roof of the old mill.

"Would you really do that for me?" he asked. "Go to England and tell her yourself, and—and try your best to comfort her? Oh, mother," he cried, with something like a sob, "you do not know how she loves me!"

He thought of their parting at the station, of their farewell, of her bitter grief, of his promise to be back long before the leaves grew on the trees, and he shuddered as he realized what she must suffer.

"It seems to me, mother," he said, "as though you were going away, sword in hand, to stab her. If she cared less for me, if she loved me less, it would not be half so horrible. I do not think I could bear it. It would seem worse than murder to me—it does seem so now."

"Trust to me," said Madame de Soldana. "You have won my gratitude by yielding to my wishes in what I know to be the most important step in your life. I will repay you by being kindness, itself, Leon; I will, indeed. She shall have an income settled upon her that will keep her in more than comfort."

He looked at his mother quite suddenly.

"I wonder," he said, "if—if her father will take her back again. He was so unwilling to give her to me."

"*Unwilling*," repeated madame. "He ought to have felt honored beyond all measure that you honored the girl with any notice at all."

The young count thought of the scene in the little arbor at the mill, and of the look on the miller's face when he bade him beware lest he might commit murder.

"If she had been the noblest lady in the land, mother, and I the poorest peasant, her father could not have been more unwilling to give her to me. He has never seen or spoken to her since her marriage, and the kindest

word he has for her is 'that he hopes the curse of the disobedient may follow her and cling to her so long as she lives.'"

"Did he say that?" asked madame, looking unusually impressed. "Poor child!" The words fell almost unconsciously from her lips. "But you see, Leon," she added, "that the curse is fulfilled — the curse of the disobedient has followed her. She married you against her father's wish — in defiance of his expressed commands — and the very marriage turns out to be invalid and worthless. I think," continued madame, "that I have never heard, in my whole life, of a more signal retribution. 'The curse of the disobedient!' What a phrase! How keenly he must have felt to have spoken so."

"And what an arrant coward, what a villain I must be, after taking her from such a father and such a home, to abandon her! Yet, oh, my fair and well-loved France, how leave thee? Mother, it would have been better for me to have died away in England there, and have been laid to rest by the shore of Allan Water."

CHAPTER XLII.

"THE sooner it is done, now, the better," said madame to herself ; "all delay is dangerous. I will go to England next week."

She watched with keen anxiety the next meeting between Princess Helene and her son. She found there was no cause for anxiety ; the girl was too much engrossed in the beauty and happiness of her love's young dream to notice anything amiss with her lover. That he seemed unhappy or distract never occurred to her. She had told him that she loved him, and she had promised, when all these disagreeable affairs were ended, to become his wife ; surely that ought to content any man—to make any man happy.

Princess Helene considered the gift of her love and the promise of her hand the greatest favor the earth could grant. It was only in her presence that Count de Soldana made the faintest pretence at happiness ; apart from her he was silent, brooding always over melancholy thoughts—completely changed—all his gayety and light-heartedness gone forever, yet, ronsing himself every now and then, asking himself why he need be so unutterably miserable, when after all, he was simply obeying the law of the land — setting aside a marriage that nothing could legalize or make valid.

"A wife in England—no wife in France." It was the law, and he must obey it ; but his self-respect was gone, never to return.

When he was with Princess Helene, her beauty, her wit and talent, her absorbing love for him made him comparatively cheerful and happy. He laughed with her, and she had, in perfection, the happy faculty that charms all men—the power to amuse them and make them laugh. No one ever passed a dull quarter of an hour with Princess Helene. When he was with her, he

forgot all else, but when absent from her he was the most miserable of men.

It had been agreed that there should be no formal announcement of the engagement until this "disagreeable affair" in England had been settled. Madame la Comtesse and Madame Vesey both agreed in that. The young people could meet, could see more of each other, learn to know each other better.

"The disagreeable affair" in England would be managed very smoothly. Madame de Soldana would go herself; she would undertake to conduct the affair, and the lawyers of course, must finish it. The marriage must be pronounced null and void according to French law; and then a settlement must be made upon the young person—that would end it. As soon as she returned from England the engagement must be announced, and the marriage take place as quickly as so grand a ceremony could be arranged.

That was madame's programme, and it seemed a very fair one. She would not tell either Madame Vesey or Princess Helene that she was going to England—better that they should not know it. Neither would she take maid or attendant with her.

"We cannot be too careful," she said to her son, when he implored her not to travel without an escort. "If I take no one with me, there will be no one to repeat what takes place, or to tell what happens."

Greatly to his distress, she started alone, and never for one moment while she was away did his own words leave him—that it seemed to him as though she were going, sword in hand, to slay the beautiful and gentle girl whose only fault had been loving him too well.

The hour came when his mother started for England on the mission which shame forbade him to fill himself. He never forgot the date or the day; it was warm and bright for the time of the year, with a blue sky and a faint odor of autumn flowers that were living still—the 10th of November and he remembered with a bitter sigh that he had been away nearly a year, he who was to have returned before the leaves were on the trees.

Madame de Soldana bade him a cheery farewell.

"It seems a strange thing to be able to travel from France to England without fear and without disguise. And now, Leon, make hay while the sun shines—profit by my absence. I hope to bring you back liberty and freedom and all good tidings. Trust me," she added, "to make everything right with the young person. I shall persuade her either to go back home or to go to America, where she would in all probability marry again."

Oh, Heaven! the spasm of horror that seized him at the thought. Lima married again; the girl whom he had loved, wooed, won, worshiped, married to another! and something told him it could never be, that for Lima there could be no other love, no other marriage possible. Madame la Comtesse saw from the pain on his face that she had made a terrible mistake, and she repented her hastily spoken words.

"You are sure that I have spoken the address right," she said—"Sweetbrier Cottage, near Lynn."

How the picture of the cottage rose before him, buried almost in the spreading boughs of the green trees. He could see the little garden, with its old-fashioned flowers, where in the summer evenings he used to sit, happy enough with his cigar and coffee, while Lima sat near to him working or reading, her every thought intent upon him. He remembered, and the memory brought back to him most bitter pain, one evening when he had clasped her in his arms and told her that he was the happiest of the Soldanas because, having lost everything else, he still had her. He remembered the rapture of love and content that had overspread her beautiful face, and he loathed himself more than he had ever done before.

Madame de Soldana went on her way, and her son returned to his luxurious home. A note came from Madame de Vesey, asking him, as Madame Comtesse was out of town, to dine with them and spend the evening with them. It was because he could not bear the agony of his own thoughts that he went.

Do as he would, he followed madame every step of the way, do as he would, he could not tear his thoughts from Lima and the banks of Allan Water.

Princess Helene laughed, talked and sung to him. She was superbly dressed, her beauty was shown to its greatest perfection. She was more animated, more vivacious than he had ever seen her, and yet he could not take his thoughts from what was going to pass on the banks of Allan Water.

"You are grave and distant, Leon," said Princess Helene. "You have deep lines on your face—why need you? Why should you, when you know that I love you?"

Princess Helene was one of those who saw nothing outside herself. If her lover looked grave, it must be that he was anxious or fearful lest she did not care sufficiently for him, and her only idea, if she saw him look grave or anxious, was to reassure him and repeat to him her earnest protestations.

If any one had told her that he was quite satisfied with the assurance of her love, and needed no more, but that his thoughts and interest were absorbed by that disagreeable English affair, she would not have believed it.

"I love you, Leon," she said; "do not look troubled or anxious, dear. How long will madame be away?"

"I do not know," he answered.

"She has gone to Belle d'Or, I understand," said Princess Helene; "she told me that she stood sorely in need of a few days' rest. Come and sing some of Mendelssohn's duets with me."

He rose and went with her to the piano, but while he sung, and while the two beautiful young voices floated through the room, he was with his mother all the time on her journey. He was with her in the train, then he could hear the wash of the waves on the shore. He was with her on board the steamboat, he could hear the throbbing of the great engines and the rush of the water through the wheels; he was with her when the passengers landed and exchanged steamboat for train.

He was with her as the train went at full speed through the land; he sees green woods in the distance, and a great broad mere, which he knows is Allan Water; he sees the picturesque old mill and the stream, then down the high-road to lovely, leafy Lynn.

There is the grammar school where he had taught, with its room darkened by tall trees that grew all around it, down the picturesque old streets out on to a beautiful road, and there in the midst of the trees stands the cottage. He sees his mother open the garden-gate, and rap at the door that was always set wide open for him ; he could see Lima going to her, full of wonder and surprise, and his mother holds the sword in her hand with which to slay her.

And the fancy is so vivid, so real, that he cries out in passionate pain. Princess Helene looks at him with wondering eyes, and he is ashamed of himself.

“What is it, count ?” asked the beautiful heiress ; “are you hurt or ill ?”

“No ; I was dreaming,” he said.

“How can a man dream while he is singing ?” she asked, half inclined to be offended, because she did not know what he was dreaming about.

“I saw—it was only a vivid, foolish fancy, which passed as it came—I saw a sword raised, and ready to fall,” he answered.

“You have been thinking of the days of the Revolution,” she said ; “they will never return ; we shall never see another queen on the scaffold.”

“I hope not,” he said, and to neither of them came a thought of the time when the beautiful empress would fly for her life, and seek protection on English shores.

“I will not sing any more,” said Princess Helene. “I thought music would cheer you, but it seems to make you more melancholy ; let us play a game at chess.”

Princess Helene liked to play a game at chess ; she could show off the matchless beauty of her white arms. The chess-board was brought out, and they sat down.

How would his mother break it to her ? In what words would she tell her that her marriage was illegal, and that although she was his wife in England, she was no wife in France ? How could Lima bear it ? Would she cry out, or faint, or fall, or die ?

Two dark eyes were looking earnestly into his, and Princess Helene was saying, in a low, tender voice :

"I am sure you are not well, Leon. I shall grow anxious over you soon."

And he said to himself that he should go mad if these thoughts did not cease to haunt him.

CHAPTER XLIII.

ALTHOUGH it was November, there were no fogs on the banks of Allen Water ; the sun shone, although it never now, as in summer-time, brightened the waters into a sheen of gold ; they were dark, tranquil, and icy cold, yet the sun shone on them ; the sedges and reeds were green, but the boughs of the lime-trees were all bare, and no flowers grew by the margin ; the water-lilies were all dead. Still, Allan Water was beautiful in its wintery dress. It was one of those rare Novembers that have in them a lingering touch of Autumn ; a few leaves linger, golden crimson and russet brown ; the sky keeps its blue, and the brambles by the hedge-side are full of color.

There was no discontent about the weather this November ; every one praised it, but hoped it would not be followed by too severe a winter.

On the banks of Allan Water stood one who watched sunlight and blue skies with sad eyes and a sad heart ; he had been away nearly a year, and when he went it was but to have been for a few days, and already winter was nigh at hand.

She had changed greatly during these few months ; she was quite unlike the bright-eyed Lima whose fair face had made sunshine in the old home. She was like a drooping flower ; the graceful lines of the tall, slender figure were there no longer, she was pale and thin ; the dainty bloom had gone from her face ; the light had gone from her eyes ; even the sheen seemed less bright on her golden hair. A flower, still fair and sweet, but over whom a blight had fallen.

That day she had been almost desperate. The fever of pain had risen until it seemed to her that her very heart was on fire. She could not bear the little cottage

that yet seemed filled with his presence. She could not bear the rooms that his handsome face had brightened, nor the chair in the pretty bay-window where he had been accustomed to sit, nor the nook in the garden where he had liked best to sit, where the flowers that he had called the white lilies of France grew. She could bear it no longer. It was with the pained and passionate cry of a wounded dam that she went out of the house that November afternoon.

Down to the banks of Allan Water, where she could see the red roof of the old home and the flight of the blue pigeons, the home she had left in sorrow, and was never to enter more.

There was the boat. There was the spot where the water-lilies grew, where he had kissed her and caressed her while her heart beat with happiness ; there was the running water — singing now as it had sung then — over which he had held her hands clasped while she made him her promise.

“A promise made over the running water is doubly binding.” She could hear the very tones of his voice as he uttered the words, *but where was he?*

She could not understand it. His long absence was a marvel to her. Where was he? What was he doing?

He had not forgotten her, for the hurriedly written letters still came. He had not deserted her, for in each letter there was some allusion to his coming back. Could it be that *he loved her less?* Good Heavens! Death itself would be better than that!

If he loved her as he had done one year ago, could he have remained all this time away from her? Ah, no — a thousand times no. He could not bear her out of his presence then. If she were away from him only a few minutes he would cry out for her, and she would hasten back to him with a sweet smile and loving words.

Now he had been long months absent. She had written to ask him to come back ; she had written to ask him if she might join him, and the answers had always been “No.” She had written to ask him what was the business that detained him there, and his answer was always that it was useless for him to attempt to explain, that he

would tell her all about it when he came home. She could bear anything, she said to herself, if only he had not learned to love her less. His love had been her sunshine, her life, her world ; she had given up everything for it ; she had left home, father, mother, all, for him. Since she had known him she had lived only for him ; without him the sun had no brightness, the skies no light, the flowers no sweetness, the birds no song ; without him the world held no sweetness, no brightness, no happiness — it was a cold, horrible blank, and to-day it pressed upon her, it drove her desperate, almost mad ; and as she stood there on the banks of Allan Water, in the whole wide world there was no heart so sad or so desolate. She stretched out her arms to the wide, deep waters.

“Oh, my love! my love! come back to me!” she cried ; “come back to me! My life is weary—I am tired of waiting for you and longing for you! Oh, love, come back !”

But the wind wailed through the bare boughs, and the waters washed wearily on the bank. No voice answered her, no lover came with loving words and warm caresses, no hand clasped hers, no lips touched hers. Chill, dreary silence—blank, hopeless desolation. She wrung her hands in silent, hopeless despair. If she could have crossed the water, if she could have gone home and wept out her sorrow on her mother’s breast, if she could have cried out and prayed to her father to draw back his curse, for it was weighing her down, it would have been some relief to her.

If she could have spoken to any one about it, if she could even have heard what other people said about his absence, it would have been easier to bear ; but the chill, cold silence seemed to be fixed round her like a band of iron, and she could not break it.

Her first thought every morning had been, “Perhaps he may come back to-day ;” her last thought every night was, “News of him may come in the morning.”

At first his absence had been a nine days’ wonder ; people had been interested and curious. The rector of Lynn and the principal of the college had called ; the count’s old pupils, the friends and parents of his pupils

had called ; many kindly inquiries had been made, much interest had been felt in the beautiful young wife who was so lonely.

But she never allowed one shadow of blame to fall upon him. She answered all inquiries with a smile ; she spoke always in the tone of one who had no cause for unjust thoughts, one whose heart was at rest. She never allowed herself to be seen with a shadow on her face, though she grew thin and pale, and an expression of weariness had crept into the eyes which had once been so full of love. Still, she spoke brightly and cheerfully, and not one soul in all Lynn knew of the bitterness of her pain — not one.

But of late the inquiries had ceased ; people asked no longer when her husband was coming back, and why he had been so long away. It had been a nine days' wonder — now it became an accepted fact.

The young French teacher had gone to France, and was staying there for some time, and his beautiful wife, the Belle of Lynn, was living alone with her little maid-servant at the cottage ; the miller still refused to hear his daughter's name mentioned.

There was much kindly sympathy expressed for her, as her sweet face grew paler and her eyes lost their bright light ; but no one ever dared to utter, before her, one word of surprise at her husband's long absence.

So she had borne her pain and her desolation until she could bear it no longer, and seeking the spot she loved best, the banks of Allan Water, she cried out to earth and heaven for pity and for help ; but none came. The afternoon was nearly over when she went back to the cottage.

“ I wish,” she said to herself, as she entered the little parlor — “ I wish I could drug myself to sleep, and not wake up until he is here.”

It was almost dark then. Something on the table, white and shining, drew her attention. Was it a letter from him ?

Her heart beat and her hands trembled. As she raised it, the chill of desolation seemed almost to stop the very current of her life.

It was not from him ; it was simply a note in an envelope, with a copy of the "Times" newspaper. She opened it eagerly. Her heart and her instinct told her it was about him—it must be about him.

Eagerly, with trembling fingers, she opened the note. It was from the principal of the college, saying with what surprise and delight he had read the inclosed paragraph in the "Times," and how earnestly he hoped it was true ; but as there was no mention of dates, he did not know whether it had just happened, or whether she had known it for some little time. In any case, he had sent her the paper, and should be pleased to hear more details from her.

What could it mean ? — what could it be ? Something about her husband, she was sure — her heart told her so. Was it good—was it news of him ? Yet how could news of him get into the "Times ? "

She took the paper which held such all-important news for her, and went to the window with it, but the shades of night had deepened ; her heart was beating so quickly, there was a mist before her eyes that dimmed them. She could not see. She cried out in an agony of impatience. And the little maid came running in.

"I want a light, Jean," she cried, quickly. "A light—I cannot see."

The girl looked half frightened at the white face and the wild, burning eyes.

"Oh, make haste—make haste," she wailed. "It is something about him, and I cannot see."

When the lamp was lighted it was not much better, for the dim mist of tears filled her eyes, and she could not see.

CHAPTER XLIV.

AT last she found it, not amongst the leading articles or the important announcements told in capital letters — not in the records of the different courts, or the pages devoted to the chronicles of Parliament — it was a small paragraph which drew attention to an act of kindness and justice on the part of the Emperor Napoleon which merited all praise. In few brief words it told the history of the De Soldanas, of the unjust confiscation, of the poverty and cruel exile of the head of the house, of his exile and death in England, of his son's life spent in exile, and of his marriage with the daughter of a house as noble as his own and quite as unfortunate, of his death in the midst of poverty and privation.

It told of the young son, Leon Comte de Soldana, born and reared in exile ; and then — the words seemed to rise up like flames before her — then it told how the friends of the De Soldanas had had a petition before the emperor, begging him to do an act of justice which would add to the splendor of his fame — to restore to the Soldanas their estates, their wealth, honor, and dignities ; and the emperor, greatly to his honor and praise, had acceded. It told how the young heir had been living in poverty in England, gaining his living by teaching French at St. Edward's Grammar School, in the old-fashioned town of Lynn — how he returned to France, and, with his mother, Madame la Comtesse de Soldana, had taken possession of his estates ; of the royal welcome accorded to him, and concluded by saying that no one of the many acts of clemency exercised by the emperor redounded so much to his honor as this.

She read it at first with breathless haste, with faint low cries of surprise and emotion, with wonder so great that it was absolute pain ; then with one half the sense of what she had read in her mind she went through it again and again, slowly, carefully, every word seeming to burn

itself on her brain. Then the paper fell from her hand, and she sat still. How long, she knew not. It was as though life had suddenly failed her.

Slowly her thoughts died one by one; she could feel them going; one by one they seemed to fold themselves up and die away. There was a time during which she had no consciousness; she lived and breathed, but the soul within her seemed dead. She did not think, or suffer, or realize. Then, slowly as they had died, her thoughts came back. Slowly as all emotion had faded from her, it came back, until the full terror of the position lay plainly before her eyes.

This, then, was what had kept him, this was why he had not cared to return to her, this was the business that had kept him away from her so long. She had pictured him overworked, overtired, always busy, always occupied, perhaps longing to be back with her, yet unable to return, while the reality was that he had been living in the midst of luxury and splendor, a favorite at court, a leader of brilliant society, while she had been waiting and watching for him on the banks of Allan Water.

"Oh, Heaven be pitiful!" was the cry that rose from her lips; "oh, Heaven be pitiful!"

This was what had kept him away, not business, not work, not the inability to return which she had thought might arise from one cause or another, but this, that he had regained his lost fortune, and had no wish to tell her. She saw now how completely she was outside this new life of his.

He had kept her in profound ignorance of it all, perhaps even he never intended her to know. She would never have known but for the "Times" newspaper, and then she could not bear the pain of those thoughts. It might be better than she feared. It was just possible that he had kept all knowledge of what was going on from her, lest she should suffer from anxiety or suspense; he had always been so considerate in shielding her from trouble and pain. It might be that he intended to return and tell her all about it when there was no longer any doubt.

She tried to comfort herself with these hopes, but they

broke down suddenly, she could find no comfort in them; there was nothing before her but black, bitter despair.

"Oh, love, how could you do this cruel deed to me?" she cried. "Oh, love, how could you so far forget me—keep our interests so far apart! Oh, love, had I been rich and you poor I would have flown to you! Love, had the fortune been mine, I should have gone to you first and laid it at your feet—I should not have enjoyed it and left you desolate!"

She tried to comfort herself by remembering how much he had loved her, how much he had worshipped her, how eagerly he had tried to win her, how he had taken her from her parents and home, how happy they had been together, how he loved her; even when they parted, he had kissed her as though he could not let her go.

Surely she was needlessly alarmed: no man's love died so suddenly as that; above all, not love like Leon's, that had been so tender and true. Surely there was no need for her great fears; she need not tremble and shudder as though the cold winds were passing over her, no need for her heart to break, no need for those terrible doubts.

He had loved her most dearly, he would so love her still; no need for the bitter, passionate sobs that rose to her lips and died there; no need that she should cry out that he was her lover and her husband, but that he had left her, he had forgotten her. Still, the time must come when he must remember her; she was his wife; she must take her own part in his life; he could not marry her and leave her, no need to fear.

Then the dark clouds would infold her, and she would cry out again that he had gone from her and that she was nothing in his life.

"A great favorite at court." Her eye caught those words. What did it mean? That her husband had his place in the most brilliant circle in Europe, had his place amongst princes and peers, amongst the most noble, the most wealthy, the most exclusive, ah, and the most beautiful of the land.

The most beautiful—that would mean that fair, high-born women surround him, and who could see him with-

out admiring and loving him? Here at Lynn—in the quaint, old-fashioned town of Lynn—all the women admired him, and what would they do in that brilliant, far-off Paris.

A new pain, a new, bewildering sensation of jealousy shot through her heart like a flame. She clasped her hands.

“Not that,” she cried, “anything but that; oh, Heaven be pitiful, I could not bear that.”

Let him enjoy his newly found fortunes if he would, without her; let him forget, if he must, her claims upon him, and her right to share his life, but that he should learn to care for another—not that.

And as she sat alone, desolate and sad beyond all words to tell, all kinds of thoughts passed through her mind; what would her father say now when he heard that the husband he had scorned for her was one of the wealthiest men in France? What would he say when he knew that she would share her husband’s wealth and title, as she must share them some day; he could not stay from her forever.

What would the people say, the sturdy neighbors and friends who had been so interested in her love-story; how astonished and surprised they would feel. So few people knew anything of his birth and position; he had simply been the young French teacher to them, a very handsome and fascinating man; but who would dream that he was Lord of Soldana? And then, as she sits in a quiet evening silence trying to form excuses for him, trying to weave faint hopes for herself, she hears quite suddenly the sound of a carriage on the high-road. The night is so still she cannot mistake the sound. Only one person could be coming to the cottage, and that would be her husband. At first she tried to rise, with a faint passionate cry of surprise, but she found herself quite unable to move; her limbs trembled, her nerves failed; she could not move or stir.

It must be he, for the carriage comes nearer and nearer.

She cries out again and again in her passion of excitement when she hears it stop at the gate. It must be

Leon. Her white lips open to call out his name, but the sound dies on them, and she thinks surely if this passionate, quick beating of her heart does not cease, she shall fall on her face dead.

The carriage has stopped. To her strained ears every sound is audible — the opening of the carriage door, the unlatching of the garden gate, the footsteps up the garden path.

But surely they are not his steps. His steps — how often she had listened to them — were quick, eager, hurried ; these were slow. He had always opened the little door of the porch and come straight to her. Whoever this was stood for some minutes outside the porch, as though looking around.

Then came a rap that seemed to Lima in her excited state as though it beat upon her very heart. She heard the door open, and the little maid answer some questions addressed to her. She heard, as one in a dream, steps leading to the parlor door. And then it was opened. The little maid stood there for one minute with a bewildered face.

Then a tall, statuesque-looking lady, richly dressed, with the dignity of an empress, came in at the door. She stood still on the threshold for some moments, looking eagerly at the beautiful, colorless face.

"I am afraid I have disturbed you," she said. "I had hoped to have reached Lynn by an earlier train."

"Who are you?" The white lips seemed rather to shape than to utter the words.

The lady smiled, but it was not altogether a pleasant smile, as she answered :

"I am Madame la Comtesse de Soldana, and I have come from France to see you."

CHAPTER XLV.

FOR some few seconds the picturesque, dignified lady and the beautiful, worn-looking girl stood looking at each other in perfect silence; then madame spoke:

"You will be surprised to see me," she said; "I am afraid, indeed, that I have startled you, but the business on which I wish to see you is so important that I preferred to come myself."

The beautiful young face, with its wearied expression, in its frame of golden hair, was raised to hers, the beautiful lips parted with a half smile of welcome, half sigh of dismay.

"Madame de Soldana," she said, gently, and then quite suddenly she remembered Leon's description of his mother.

"The poorest and the proudest woman in Europe." Poor no longer, but proud, ah, yes, every curve of the statuesque figure, every line on the haughty face told that. His mother—Leon's mother! Leon's mother come to see her on important business! Where, then, in Heaven's name, was he? Why should his mother come and not he? There must be something wrong, and before that proud patrician lady, Lima felt her courage fail, her fair face grew colorless, and her lips quivered with pain.

"You are my husband's mother," she said, slowly.

A light gleam in madame's dark eyes.

"I am the mother of the Count de Soldana," she replied.

"And I," cried Lima, hurriedly, "I am his wife. I remember that long ago he spoke to me of you. I am his wife, madame, but where is he, why is he not here? my very heart is weary of waiting for him; why is he not here?"

"I have much to tell you," said madame. "I have travelled all these weary miles in order to do so—but I

will defer what I have to say until I have taken some refreshment. I dismissed the carriage, thinking it probable that I could remain here for the night ; I leave for Paris to-morrow morning."

Lima rang for the maid whose face of wonder and dismay at the stately presence of madame would have amused her at another time ; now she could only ask herself the one question, why was madame here ? Where was her husband, and why was he not here ?

In a few minntes the little table whereat Leon had sat so often was spread, and madame, with all the grace and dignity of an empress, was seated at tea. A simple little tea, but very acceptable after that long journey, for madame had not halted by the way : she had been too intent on her business. She drank her tea in silence ; the wistful appeal in those blue eyes did not touch her in the least. She had come here to carry out certain measures, and it must be done. She sat in silence—her own instinct told her that, with such tragic news, idle or commonplace consolation would be cruelty.

But Lima drew nearer and nearer to her. She was like a bird fascinated by the eyes of a snake. She did not wish to go near madame, but she could not avoid it ; she seemed drawn there. She hovered round the stately figure, and round the little table, her beautiful eyes asking questions that any other woman less hard of heart must have answered ; at last she said, gently, and in a voice quite unlike her own :

“ Madame, where is my husband, Leon ? ”

“ Monsieur le Count is in Paris,” answered Mme. de Soldana. She knew that she must not once allow this word husband, or admit the title.

“ And why,” said Lima, “ why is he not here ? ”

“ That is what I have come to tell you,” said madame. “ It is an unpleasant business, and I thought I could manage it better than my son.”

Yet it was not easy to begin. She remembered Leon’s words, that it seemed to him she had started out with sword in hand to slay ; and, though she was by no means of a tender or sympathetic nature, she did not like the task before her ; yet, it must be gone through, for the

honor of the Soldanas. It was not easy to begin. She rose from her chair; she walked up and down the little room stopping at times to think if it were possible that her son, who seemed so thoroughly at home and at ease in the magnificent rooms of his chateau, if he could ever have been happy here, in this little, homely house, pretty enough, but only a homely little cottage after all. Could he ever have felt at his ease here?

How out of place that princely face and figure must have been here; and then she remembered her son's words—that Lima had cheered his loneliness and brightened his exile. How lonely he must have been she could tell better now she had seen the pretty but isolated little home, and her heart softened just a little to the girl who had helped him to bear his exile; not to any great extent—every thing must give way to the honor of the Soldanas. And as madame paced restlessly up and down the room, she remembered a story told of one of her ancestors, the Marquis de Faille—a story that perhaps helped the Revolution more than any other told in France.

He was late in joining a fête given at a neighboring chateau, and he gave orders that his coachman should drive at a hard pace and stop for nothing on the way. Nothing! He was hurried and anxious to be there. They had to drive through the streets of the village, all of which belonged to him.

It was after school-hours, and the village children were all playing in the streets. Once, twice, thrice, with an impatient oath, the marquis had seen the carriage stopped because a child was in the way; once, twice, thrice he cried out to his coachman not to stop again, but, if the little demons came in the way to ride over them.

And the next that came in the way, a fair-haired little girl, was ridden down, ridden over, not killed, but crushed and mangled, so there could be no more youth and no more beauty for her. Monsieur le Marquis cared nothing for the pain of the child, nothing for the anguish of the parents, nothing for the hatred and execrations of the crowd, nothing for the fact that when he reached the chateau the blood of the child was still wet on his car-

riage-wheels ; he cared only that he had not lost much of the fête.

That was her ancestor, for she belonged to the once powerful family of the De Failles, and their instincts and traditions were all hereditary ; she had inherited them with her name.

Her ancestor, the handsome Marquis de Faille, who was afterward beheaded in the midst of a shrieking crowd, had ridden over a child who barred his way. She in her turn had to plunge a sharp sword in the heart of this girl whose only fault was that she had loved her son. She would not shrink from the task, but all the same she was a woman, and her hand unskilled in murder.

She wished that her son had never used those words. She could see herself so plainly sword in hand. She looked at the beautiful white neck, and shuddered as she thought how she must plunge the sword in.

“I am afraid,” said Lima, “that you will be tired, madame. Will you not sit down ?”

The lovely, weary face, and the gentle voice, smote her. Madame had never dreamed that her task would be so difficult.

She stood just before Madame la Comtesse, her hands clasped, her blue eyes full of wistful questions.

“Madame de Soldana,” she said, “will you tell me something of Leon ? It is so long since I have seen him ; he went away saying that he should only be absent for a few days, and it is almost a year since he left me. I have nearly died of pain and desolation ; I long to see him ; my heart aches for him ; my eyes are weary with watching for him ; my whole soul is waiting for him. Madame, where is he ?”

It was not pleasant ; not all the courage, the instinct of the De Failles, could make it so.

She looked steadily at the girl’s face for a few seconds as though she would see how much it was possible for her to bear ; with what abruptness she could tell the truth ; how much she must spare her, how much she could inflict upon her without injury. And as she looked into the face her heart softened still more. It was so

lovely, yet so delicate and fragile ; she was surprised, too, at its dainty refinement. This girl before her was quite as patrician in appearance as Princess Helene. If possible, she was more so, owing to the delicacy of her coloring, and the sheen of her golden hair. Madame had expected in a miller's daughter something of the half-vulgar, half-buxom type. This slender girl, with her dainty, sweet loveliness, was not at all what she expected to see. Still, she must slay and spare not, for the honor of the Soldanas was at stake.

"Will you tell me, madame, something about Leon ? Is he well ? Is he happy ? Sometimes, for nights together, I have not slept, and for days together I have not rested. I am thinking always of him."

Now was the time to raise her hand and strike — now to plunge the sharp sword through the white gentle breast into the loving heart — now to strike with true aim and deadly intent.

Yet she paused. The lovely blue eyes were so full of pleading, the fair face so wistful, the voice so sweet that repeated —

"Tell me something of Leon, madame, if it only be that he is well and happy."

"Strike and spare not — slay, not save !" were the words that rose to madame's mind, and then, bold enough she plunged the sharp sword in the white breast up to the hilt.

"It is of Leon, my son, that I have come to speak to you," said madame. "I am sorry to be what you will think the bearer of evil news to you ; but duty must be done, be it disagreeable as it may."

She saw the life die, as it were, from the fair, sad face.

"I have to tell you," continued madame, "that your marriage with my son is illegal and invalid, a perfectly worthless ceremony ; and that here in England, owing to the laxity of the law, you may call yourself his wife, yet in France, and by the law of France, you are not his wife at all."

The sword was driven in up to the hilt, and she watched the girl's face narrowly, to see if she would die under the shock of her words.

CHAPTER XLVI.

"I do not understand," said Lima, slowly. "I am Leon's wife. We were married at the church at Haslingdene, and he, Leon, said that every formality had been complied with. I—I remember all the trouble he took over it, how particular he was about the number of days' notice, and living in the right parish. Oh, madame, you—you mistake; our marriage is legal enough."

"According to English law," said madame, calmly, "but not in France. I can explain it to you in few words. In France the marriage-law favors the authority of parents, prevents ill-assorted marriages, for it says that no minor can contract a marriage without the formal consent and sanction of parents or guardians, and that if he does contract such a marriage, it is null and void, and can be set aside at the suit of parents or guardians. That is what my son has done," continued madame, holding the sword with firm clasp. "He is under age; he has married without my consent or sanction. His marriage is, consequently, null and void, against the law, and must be put aside."

The face of the girl who listened to these terrible words had grown perfectly white, and a great, nameless dread came into her blue eyes; not that she feared. She knew that she was married, and this strange, proud, foreign lady knew nothing of the marriage-laws of dear old England.

Had it been less terrible, she would have laughed. Most certainly she was Leon's wife; if not, what was she? She remembered the solemn and beautiful words of the marriage-service:

"Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder." Assuredly they were joined together in the house of God, and in the presence of Heaven. What could any little insignificant human law matter? In

spite of her pain, she almost smiled as she looked in madame's face.

"That law ! No law can touch me," she said, gently. "I am married to Leon ; neither English, French, or any other law can set aside this great law of God. I am married to Leon ; nothing can unmarry me or take me from him."

"Your marriage was against the law of the land, therefore in the eyes of the law it is no marriage."

"It is a marriage complete, valid and formal before Heaven !" she cried.

"Heaven is not France," said madame, "nor is France Heaven, and as my son has to live in France he must comply with its laws."

"But, madame, I am his wife," she repeated. "He chose me out of the whole wide world ; he loved me, he wooed me, and my father was not willing, he could not endure the thought of the marriage, and I—oh, madame, my heart was nearly broken—and Leon persuaded me to run away with him ; we could not live apart any longer ; and now you say it is no marriage ; it must be : he meant it, I meant it. Heaven saw it. Oh, Leon, Leon," she cried, wildly, "where are you, why do you not come to help me ! Madame, let my husband come, he will tell you !" Then with a cry of passionate pain, she added : "Does he know—does Leon know that you have come to tell me this ?"

"Yes," answered madame, and the girl for a few minutes seemed to be beside herself with grief.

"He knew !" she cried. "He knew that you were coming to tell me this—and did not come with you, did not come to tell you that, law or no law, our marriage was a true one ?"

"He could not have come with me to have said that," interrupted madame, "because he knows that it would be false ; the law steps in between you and him, and the law must be obeyed."

Then a bright, hot flush came into Lima's face, a flash of light into the lovely blue eyes.

"Madame," she said, "I would not be rude to you, I would not be discourteous, but I can hardly believe that

law exists, and if it does exist, it is so unjust, so monstrous, that it is a blot on France."

"That is from your point of view," said madame, coldly. "You will find I am right. As the French marriage law stands, you are my son's wife in England, but not in France."

"It is impossible!" cried Lima.

"It is true," repeated madame.

"Has this same thing ever happened to any one else beside me?" cried Lima.

"Yes," replied madame, "It has happened frequently. Within the last three months two similar marriages have been put aside."

"But is there no hope, no help for any girl to whom this happens?" asked Lima.

"There is one remedy," she replied. "If it should be a marriage of which parents and guardians approve, and formal permission is obtained for it, the ceremony can be repeated in France, and then it will be legal, but not without that."

She looked up then with something of relief, with something of gladness.

"Oh, madame!" she cried, "why did you not tell me so before? I was growing frightened." She caught her breath with a great, passionate sob. "I was afraid," she repeated. "My hands have grown cold, and my heart nearly stopped beating. You can help us! You will—you will give your permission? We did not know, neither of us knew. Leon meant me to be his wife, he loved me so dearly. You will give your permission, and all will be well? Oh, Heaven, how frightened I was!"

"Make no mistake," cried madame. "It is true that is the remedy, but it is a remedy that will never be applied to you. I shall never give my consent to my son's legal marriage with you, and without that consent there can be no marriage."

The next moment the girl was kneeling at her feet, and never while life lasted did madame forget the agony on that fair young face.

"Do not take Leon from me," she prayed. "Oh,

madame, be pitiful, be merciful to me! I love him! — he is my own! — do not take him from me! You are his mother—I am his wife. I cannot lose him. I love him — he loves me. I have been his wife all these long months past. My heart is knit to his — my soul is one with his. I have no life apart from him. Oh, madame, do not take him from me!"

"I am sorry," said madame, "but it must be done."

"It need not be done. You will not do it—you could not be so cruel! Why, Leon has said a hundred times over that death should not part us, and now you, his mother, would do so."

"I must," said madame, "for the honor of the Soldanas."

"To their eternal dishonor, madame, if you do this thing! I see—I understand—my husband is not of age, and all power lies in your hands. As you are strong, be merciful. Do not separate me from my husband."

Her voice quivered with pain, but there was no passion in her voice. It was deep, earnest, as is the voice of one who prays in the last extremity of danger.

In her earnest simplicity she caught madame's jewelled hand and tried to clasp it in her own, but it was quickly and coldly withdrawn.

"The marriage, even had it been a valid one, was the most unsatisfactory one possible," said madame. "My son has just regained his long-lost inheritance. I do not know whether he told you that."

"No, he did not tell me," replied the girl, sadly.

"He has just taken possession of one of the finest properties in France — one of the oldest titles — and he must marry from his own class — he must marry some one who has rank and wealth, and whose connections would be useful to him. A marriage with a low-born English girl would be ruinous to him."

"But, madame," said Lima, with earnest passion, "he will never give me up! I remember, during one of those happy summer evenings we spent together in the garden there, he said to me: 'I am the happiest Soldana of them all, because, having lost all, I have found you.' He valued me far above all the land and the gold he has

won. Ah, madame, you do not know your son ! He is too noble, too generous ; he will never set me aside on this weak excuse of an unjust law."

" My son is the soul of honor ; but this is a sacrifice which honor demands from him."

" But to which he can never accede — he cannot madame," she continued with quiet, desperate earnestness. " He knows that we were married — he knows that we stood together before the altar of Heaven—he knows that nothing but death can part us— "

" Yes," interrupted madame, " I can ! "

Then, with tears that would have moved a heart of stone ; with words that were so sweet, so sad, so prayerful, they must have won one less cold than the Countess of Soldana, she prayed to her for pity, for help ; she prayed for more than life, but madame would not relent.

" It would be more merciful," sobbed the girl, " if you were to kill me as I kneel here than take him from me, without whom I cannot live. Oh, madame, take all the world, but leave me Leon, my husband."

" You must not think," said madame, and this time she spoke more gently, for she knew what her words cost the hapless girl before her — " you must not think that I am the only one interested in the matter. My son, too, sees the impossibility of such a marriage."

" Not Leon !" cried the girl, " not Leon ! — my husband ! I will believe in all else, but never that. I will believe in the unjust law ; I will believe in the cruelty which prompts you to put me from Leon ; but I will never believe that Leon wishes to leave me—never ! "

" Leon wishes to do all that is honorable, but neither the honor of his family nor his own future will permit him to return to you. You must be generous and give him up."

" I give up Leon !" she cried ; " never, until the sea gives up its dead. He is mine, and I will keep him through time and through eternity if I can ! "

" Fortunately," said madame, " there is a higher power than your will, and to that power you must yield."

CHAPTER XLVII.

FAR into the night the two ladies sat. The whole of the dark, terrible truth was laid bare before Lima now. She saw plainly what it would cost Leon to return to the only country where she could be legitimately called his wife: she could understand the excessive anxiety of Mme. de Soldana that this marriage should be set aside: she could understand that an alliance with a powerful and noble family would be advantageous to him; but she would not believe that he knew of his mother's mission, or that he himself wished the marriage to be set aside; she clung to him with perfect faith—he loved her; he loved her; he would never desert her. She sat like a statue of despair, while madame talked to her of the glory of the Soldanas; little did it matter to that aching heart what madame talked of the magnificent provision which should be made for her.

The blue eyes, once so shining and bright, now heavy with tears of woe, were raised slowly to the proud face.

“Madame,” she said, “I want no money—I only want Leon.”

“And Leon,” cried madame, sharply, “is the one thing you cannot have! You English call yourselves generous and courageous—show yourself to be so; be brave and self-sacrificing, give him up freely and generously, so that he shall not suffer pain; that is what a true woman would do.”

“A *true* woman! Oh, madame, no! What woman would give up a husband she loves because there is some flaw, or quibble, or injustice, in the law of one land that exists in no other? As a *true* woman, madame, I will cling to my husband. I will keep to my faith in him. I will believe in his vows and promises to me!”

“But you cannot change the law!” said madame, in a hard, cold voice.

She tried to harden herself, for her heart was touched by this great love for her son.

"No, I cannot change the law," said Lima, "but I can appeal to something far above it. I can appeal to the love of my husband, and to the just God in whose presence those vows were made."

"Do you think it likely," asked madame, "that my son would give up the lands that have just fallen to his possession — the wealth, the honors, the dignities, all the magnificent future that lies before him — all to return to exile and to you?"

"Yes," replied Lima, "I do believe it. I believe that he would give up all and everything for me, as I would for him. I believe it, because he said it — and that he would give up France and all the wealth of the Soldanas for love of me. I will never believe otherwise, madame, but from his own lips."

And madame began to see that in the frail, delicate girl before her there was a spirit as indomitable as her own; she might break, but never bend; the girl might die, but she would never yield. It was more of a difficult task than she had fancied.

"If Leon himself tells me that this is true, if with his own lips he tells me that he repents his marriage with me, then — then I am ready to die, to yield, but not until then, not until he tells me."

"It is to spare my son that most disagreeable task that I am here," said madame.

"But why," cried Lima, "why must he be spared, while I suffer? It is not just. Why — why must all the suffering fall on me?"

"I do not say that it is so," replied madame. "I must own that my son suffers, and suffers greatly. It is to spare him all I can that I came. It will be needless and useless for you to see him. If you were to see him a hundred times over, he could only tell you the same thing. That is the law, and you must both abide by it."

"I shall hear it only from his own lips," said Lima. "Leon loved me. Ah, madame, he loved me better than he loves the wealth and honor you estimate so highly. He loved me best; he would never have done

this. It is not like my Leon ; he would never have deserted me and have let another come and tell me so. It is only from his own lips I will believe it—from no other's.'

Then madame began in some measure to lose patience. She had been prepared to exercise some kindness, some patience, but she was not prepared for this persistent, earnest opposition. Her patience failed her.

"I hope," she said, sharply, "that you will do nothing to annoy my son. You may take my word just as you would his. His plans are all formed ; when this business is settled, and you are amply provided for, my son will marry, and marry from his own class. To show you how idle and useless all appeal is, I may tell you that he has selected a wife, and the marriage will take place on my return."

If she had known how cruel the words were, she would not have uttered them ; they seemed literally to transfix the girl.

She stood still for some few minutes under the shock of them, with a look on her white face that will haunt madame till she dies—a look of unutterable despair. That was the one thing she had prayed would not be. She could bear anything on earth but *that*, and as she listened the words seemed to fall like molten drops of lead on her heart. She looked like one suddenly stricken dead. Even madame herself was alarmed at the ghastly pallor of her face.

Then those eyes, so heavy with grief, were raised to madame's face.

"I will not believe it," she said slowly. "He could not do it. He is Leon, my love, my husband!—he will never give me up and betray me!—he will never marry another while I live!—he will never desert me! Madame, I do not believe it."

"It is true," said madame. "My son, the Comte de Soldana, will marry Mademoiselle de Saison, the richest heiress and the most beautiful girl in France."

She need not have said these last words ; it was unnecessary cruelty ; the beautiful blue eyes dilated with

horror. There could be no doubt that these few words threw the tried brain off its balance.

"If I believed you, madame," she said slowly, "I should fall down dead here before your face; but I do not—I do not—I cannot. I will only believe it when he tells me—when he says: 'Lima, once my love, you are not my wife. I am going to desert you—to betray you—to abandon you. I love some one else, and mean to marry her.' When my husband says that to me, I will believe him, and—and die."

Then, with eyes full of pain, she looked into madame's face.

"You say that she—this French lady—is beautiful?"

"She is, I think, the most beautiful girl in France," answered madame.

"And—rich?" asked the faint, anxious voice.

"She is a wealthy heiress," answered madame.

"Beautiful and rich!" murmured Lima. "And, madame, tell me truly for Heaven's sake does Leon—does my husband love her?"

"I believe," said madame, earnestly, "that he loves her with all his heart."

A slight shudder ran through the slender figure.

"He has soon forgotten me, if that be true," she said, slowly. "Yet it does not seem a long time since he said I was the sunshine of his life, the one only love of his heart—not long," she added, with a dreary sigh. "But I will never believe it—I will not believe it until he tells me so himself."

Then madame rose from her seat.

"I am tired," she said, "and I should like to go to my room. We will finish our conversation to-morrow. To-morrow we will make all our arrangements; I will settle for you where you are to live and what you will have to live upon. I am too tired to-night to say more."

The blue eyes, with their daze of horror and pain, looked into hers.

"You quite understand, madame," she said, "that I do not believe it—that I will not believe it until my husband tells me the same thing with his own lips."

"One thing is quite certain," said madame; "he will

not come here to tell you. You must please yourself as to believing ; I shall not give myself the trouble to repeat one word. Good-night."

And with a stately step madame quitted the room, following the little maid to the apartment prepared for her.

She slept soundly; no haunting dreams of the girl whose fair young life she had slain came to her, no sorrowful thoughts. She had saved her son from the consequences of his folly, and she vindicated the honor of the Soldanas. Her ancestor, the Marquis de Faille, slept just as soundly after his carriage had driven over the child. On the whole, she was pretty well satisfied ; the interview might have proven much more disagreeable —Lima might have been much more difficult to manage. As it was, all would end well ; on the morrow she would attend to the financial part of the business, and then it would be ended. Madame laid her head on the white pillow, with its faint odor of lavender, quite contented.

But if there was a heart at rest in the room above, there was one nigh broken in the room below. For some short time Lima stood where madame had left her, her hands clasped, her fair head drooping on her breast, her heart aching until it seemed to her that she must die of the pain.

The waves of memory and of sorrow that swept over her as she stood, dazed and bewildered her—that Leon had left her ; that his marriage with her was no marriage ; that his wish was to leave her—and, oh, sorrow above all sorrow!—that he had learned to care for some one else—the most beautiful girl in France!

Ah, never—that should never be! She would not believe it from any lips but his, and even if he told her it was to be so, *it should never be*. No woman living should step in between Leon and herself to part them ; no woman living, no matter how beautiful or how rich, should take her husband from her. She would go to him—straight to him—leaving madame where she was. Without one word to any one living she would go to him and know the truth.

How, mattered little. Quietly, as though she had been

going to the banks of Allan Water, she put on her bonnet and mantle. If any one had met her in that dazed state, and had asked her where she was going, she would have answered, quite simply :

“ To France—to see Leon ! ”

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A WEIRD wind was blowing that night; it seemed to have a human voice within it. It rose and fell, it wailed and sobbed, it moaned and cried—it was neither cold nor bitter; but it racked the big branches, and bent the tall, bare heads of the trees; it sighed over the broad bosom of Allan Water, rippling the surface that generally lay so clear and still under the light of the moon. Sitting round a cheerful fire, with bright lights and laughing companions, it is delightful to listen to such a wind; its weird melancholy has a charm then; the long-drawn sobs and sighs are more musical than sad. A wind that had in it the faint echoes of great tragedies, the piteous cries of lost souls, the wailing of unutterable woe; it sighed in tall pine-trees, in the grand old oaks, in the aspens that grew near the water, in the great larches that stood so erect and vigorous; but there was no spot where its voice was so sad or so pathetic as in the spreading branches of the lime-trees that grew on the banks of Allan Water. The stoutest heart must have trembled, the most courageous must have slightly quailed; never was music so strange, so weird, so sad; never was sound at once so beautiful, so terrible, or so melancholy.

The bright afternoon was fading away into the darkness of night when Mrs. Derwent, tired of the house, tired of her own ceaseless and bitter misery, went out to the only place where comfort and solace ever came to her. From the time that Lima was a child—a fair, lovely child with golden hair and laughing, lovely mouth, with sweet, unconscious grace of smile, and voice, as clear and silvery as a nightingale’s—she had associated her with the lime-trees.

This woman, whose lot in life was but lowly ; who was more than content with her destiny ; who knew nothing of pride, ambition, or desire for fame ; who loved the fair and simple beauties of nature more than words could tell, and more than she herself knew how to express ; this gentle and refined woman had the soul of a poet. It might seem strange that such a soul should have been given to her, whose life was so completely hidden, so completely absorbed in simple duties, but there it was.

Had she been a woman of education, or had she in early life moved in the society of intellectual people who would have understood her, in all probability her beautiful and poetical thoughts would have found vent in words, and the world would have been the richer by another great poetess ; but she was quite unconscious of her own powers ; she even carefully concealed them. If she put into words her thoughts over trees and flowers, over the water that rippled under the moon, or the stars that shone by night, her husband laughed at them—a kindly, good-natured laugh, it is true, but there was in it a laugh of contempt. Lima had understood her, because she had inherited some of her nature—no one else did.

What that gentle, kindly woman suffered through the estrangement of father and daughter, no one could ever tell or estimate. She loved them both, and would have given her life for them.

She had never dared to disobey her husband's commands, although her very heart yearned toward her daughter. She had never dared to disobey him and seek her out. The only comfort she had in her life, and that was a small one, was that she could occasionally hear news of her from Mrs. Grey, of Clover Farm, who saw Lima at times when she went to Lynn. The poor mother listened with a hungry heart to every detail that could be brought to her, longing always to hear more, listening with fast-falling tears, longing with unutterable longing for one glance, one kiss of that beautiful face, yet feeling in her heart that she must stand by her husband's wishes and obey his commands. Lima had her husband, and Mrs. Grey brought home many a story of his devotion to her ; Lima had her husband, but the miller had

no one now save herself. She knew however much he might love her, he would not hesitate for one moment in carrying out his threats; if ever he discovered that she had any communication with her daughter, no matter how or by what means, he would send her from his doors and never see her again. She said to herself one could measure his love for Lima and the hatred of what she had done from that fact alone.

Lima was happy in the love and devotion of her handsome young husband. She had chosen him in preference to them, but if the miller were left alone who would there be to console or to comfort him? Her heart melted at the picture of her husband, grown haggard, old, and gray, brooding ever and always over the terrible wound of his life, the loss of his daughter.

Ah, no! she must be loyal to him—help him, cheer him, as good wives do. It would all come right in time; she prayed Heaven every day of her life, and sometimes all day long that father and child might be reconciled; it must come in time. Heaven would never be dead to her many prayers, and in the meantime she must be patient and bear her cross as well as she could.

She was patient: although Lima was always in her mind and in her thoughts, she never named her. There were nights when she sobbed herself to sleep, and mornings when she rose her pillow was wet with tears; but strong as was the impulse to speak to her, bitter as was the pain of repressing that longing, she never once uttered the beloved name. She watched the miller earnestly and continually for any sign of relenting, and then she would have said all that her heart was full of. But those signs never came; there was no relenting in the gloomy, sorrow-stricken man who had written the word “died” after his daughter’s name.

Of late Mrs. Derwent had been more unhappy than usual. She had not heard of Leon’s going to France until February, and then she had heard a strange garbled account, so that she thought he had just gone. She heard again in June that he had not returned, but that Lima expected him home every day. She heard the same story continually—that he had not returned, but

that he was expected every day ; and she longed to kneel at her husband's knees, to say to him that Lima was all alone, and beg of him for pity's sake to let her go to see her ; but there was that in his face which forbade it ; such a prayer from her would but have made matters worse, so it died unspoken on her lips.

Mrs. Grey could tell her nothing ; no reason was even given why the young husband was so long away. But one thing Mrs. Grey did tell her, and that was, Lima looked very ill — that she had lost her beautiful color ; she was growing thin and pale — that her eyes were dim and her step without fleetness.

“ She is miserable, I am sure,” said the farmer's wife. “ If ever I saw misery on any face, it is written on her's.”

And those words had seemed to burn themselves on the mother's brain.

She walked to and fro beneath the lime-trees, her heart heavy with its weight of woe, listening to that weird, sad music, and wondering what the wind was wailing over. It was dark when she went back to the mill ; the fire was burning brightly, and the miller sat reading the paper by the light of the lamp. The little scene looked bright enough, but to the mother it was desolate without her child.

“ You are late, Helen,” said the miller. “ It is late and cold, and dark, my dear ; where have you been wandering ? ”

“ I have been walking under the lime-trees,” she said.

The miller's face darkened at the words. He knew well that the lime-trees had spoken to her of Lima. That was why she looked pale and worn. The lime-trees and Lima were, he knew, one in her mind.

“ The lime-trees ! ” he repeated, with some little scorn. “ Do you not think it would have been much more sensible if you had sat by the fireside here ? ”

“ I could not help going out, John,” she answered, dreamily. “ Something seems to call me. I am always restless when the wind blows in this fashion. I hear voices in it. I wonder if other people do the same ? ”

"Other people have generally a grain of common sense," said the miller, with a grim smile.

"I cannot help it," she continued. "If I were to tell you, John, what the wind has been wailing through the trees, what dirge it has been singing, what a mournful lament seemed to pass through the branches and die on the ground—you would hardly believe it."

"I am sure I should not," he answered her. "Come, Helen, sit down by the fire and lose that dazed, troubled look; forget all about the lime-trees."

"I cannot," she answered, with a shudder. "Oh, if I dare—if I dare but tell you what they said. Oh, John, my heart is breaking," and the unhappy woman flung herself on her knees at his feet with a passionate outburst of tears. "There is danger abroad," she cried, "I cannot tell where it is or what it is, but it is abroad, and I can feel it; I can hear it. Oh, John, listen!"

The wind rose with a plaintive sigh, with a weird, melancholy sobbing that would have frightened a more courageous person. It beat on the surface of Allan Water until they could hear the faint sound as it washed the reeds and the sedges.

"Even the water is rising, John; I can hear it. Oh, my dear, there is danger. The wind would never wail like that unless something were wrong. I—" but she dare not finish her sentence. She had been on the point of saying—"I am afraid for Lima," but at the sight of his face the words died on her lips.

"Mind what you are saying!" cried the miller. He knew that she was about to utter her daughter's name, and he would never have forgiven her had she done so; but the sight of her white, tearful face touched him. He threw his strong arm round her. "Never mind," he said, "I will take care of you, Helen; nothing shall harm you while I am near."

CHAPTER XLIX.

SCREAMING, shrieking, with sobs and moans so exactly like those of a human voice, it seemed as though some great tragedy must be taking place on Allan Water; the wind seemed almost to rock the old mill. It was past midnight, and as yet the miller's wife had found no rest; it was as though the wind swayed her, as though its melancholy, mad music touched her brain. Her comely face was white and drawn, her eyes wild with fright and terror. More than once she had started up, feeling sure that some one was crying at the window, wanting to enter the room. The miller had been very patient with her and very kind to her, but at last he had fallen asleep, and the wind might blow as it listed.

Mrs. Derwent went to the window. Surely that must be a human voice, so full was it of human anguish and pain. She would have hardly been surprised had she seen there a white, wild face, but there was nothing. The night was dark, with the faintest possible light in the sky; the white clouds hurried along, the wind seemed to drive them across the sky; no moon, no stars. She could hear the bending of the branches and the wash of the waters; but *what*, what was it the wind was saying?"

"Oh, Heaven! send me rest!" she prayed; "send me sleep!"

Then — she was quite sure of it — a voice called, "Mother!" a sweet, clear voice, the sound of which had always warmed her heart with love. Above the sobs and sighs, above the rustling of the boughs, it came again — "Mother!" And in it there was the ring of passionate pain. She turned to her husband.

"John! John!" she cried, "listen! Do you hear anything—I do—out there in the dark night?"

"No," answered the miller, "I hear nothing."

"I do—I do!" she cried. "I hear it! Oh, John!" Again the shrill, sweet cry — "Mother!" She looked

at her husband, and the very bitterness of death was in her eyes.

"Do you know what it is?" she asked. "It is nothing living. No living voice has that sound save one."

"I know," he answered, and he turned from her with a look that she never again saw on his face. She went to the window; she did not wait to ask this time; her very heart seemed to be drawn from her breast by that cry. She opened it, and the miller said no word.

At first there was nothing but the darkness of the night and the wailing of the wind, then once again the cry of "Mother!" and then, her eyes piercing the gloom and the darkness of the night, because of the love that filled them, against the great alder trees she saw quite plainly—Lima, with her arms raised and her hands clasped.

Silently and swiftly she went back to her husband; she spoke no word, but led him to the window, and pointed to the figure under the trees.

"It is dark, John," she said, after a time, "but you can see."

"I can see," he said, gruffly; "but, mind, I keep my word. The dead cannot return—the dead shall not enter here."

"Mother, are you there? Can you hear me?" cried Lima, and the miller's wife seized her husband's arm.

"Say I may speak, John!" and her words were so sharply uttered they sounded almost like a hiss in his ears.

"Speak," he answered.

"I hear you, my love, my darling!" cried the hapless mother.

"I will not come to the threshold of the door until my father bids me come—but, oh, mother, mother! I am in such sore distress!"

"May I bid her come, John?" asked his wife.

"No!" thundered the miller. "She had to choose between him and me. She chose him, let her go to him."

"Mother, listen to me, I cannot see you, but I know you are there. Tell my father that the curse is falling heavily—falling down on me and crushing my life—the

curse of the disobedient that is to follow me wherever I go. Ask him to take it back before it crushes me."

"Oh, John, for Heaven's sake, be pitiful to the child, our only child — the little fair-haired child you loved so dearly once ; be pitiful to her, speak to her!"

"I will *not*," he answered. "She made her choice, let her abide by it."

"At least, if you have no pity, no mercy, be just. She asks you to take that terrible curse from her. Let me tell her that you will?"

"It shall stay as it is," he said, sternly. "She is dead to me. You saw me write the date when she died."

His anger was growing, was making him savage and fierce ; to see her who had been the very joy of his heart, whom he had loved as few fathers love their children, maddened him. It was the very intensity of his love for her that made him so desperate and angry now ; to think how she would have been cherished and beloved at home ; to see her standing there in the cold and darkness maddened him, and the madness of his anger fell upon her. He was far more likely to have redoubled his curse than to have withdrawn it.

"Mother," cried Lima, "pray to him — pray to him ! Tell him that it is killing me ! Tell him it is falling on me in so cruel a shape — so cruel a form — that I cannot bear it ! Tell him I cannot bear it !"

"Will you take pity on her, John ?"

"No ; as she has sown let her reap. She shall not enter my doors. I will never see her or speak to her again. She is dead !"

"Dead !" The wind seemed to catch up the word and fling it over the rustling branches.

"Say no more, wife. Come away ; if I stand here and listen to this much longer I shall go mad, or I shall do some mischief."

"Lima !" cried the hapless mother, "what is it ? What are you doing here ? What has brought you here at this time of night ? What has happened ?"

"I have come to ask my father to take that terrible curse from me, for I am going away, and I am frightened. Oh ! mother ! listen while I tell you all. They have

taken my Leon, my husband, from me. He went away at Christmas time, and has never returned. He is a rich man now—all his money and lands have been given back to him; he is great and powerful. They have taken him from me. They say—oh! false and cruel lie!—that my marriage was not a valid one; that I am his wife in England, *and not in France*. His mother has come to tell me so; and they want him to marry some beautiful and wealthy lady who lives in France."

"John," cried the miller's wife, "do you not hear it? Will you not speak? Will you not go to the rescue of your only child? Will you not avenge her?"

"No, she took her fate in her own hands," he answered; but his face was pallid with a pallor that was terrible to see. If Leon de Soldana had been near him, there would have been murder, and of a terrible kind, too.

"I am going away, mother. I will not believe what this proud, wicked woman tells me. I am going to find my husband, and know from his own lips whether there is any truth in the story. I will not believe one word, except from him. I am going away to France to find him, and I am sorely afraid. I have never been on the sea before, and I come to pray my father to take that curse from me, lest the waves of the sea should carry it out and drown me. I could not go without coming to tell you. I knew my father would not speak to me; I knew he would not let me come inside the door, but I thought he would take that curse from me which is crushing me. I could not go without coming back to tell you both how I love you. How I grieve—never that I have married my dear love, but that I have disappointed you who have always been so loving, so good to me."

In the faint light that came from the sky they saw her stretch out her hands to them in mute appeal, and then, with a cry of unuttered pain, she was gone.

"Lima, Lima!" cried the helpless mother. "Lima, come back!"

The wind seemed to catch up the words and to re-echo them over the broad breast of Allan Water. But Lima

was gone — there was nothing but the bare branches of the alder-trees.

“Lima!” she cried again, but the miller turned to her with a dark, set face.

“Not another word, Helen,” he said; “I have had quite enough.”

She looked at him for the first time in her life with a defiant expression on her face, and her eyes flashed angrily into his.

If a white dove had turned suddenly and wounded him, he could not have been more surprised.

“You are merciless, John Derwent!” she cried — “cruel and merciless to my child; cruel and unjust! The time will come when the mercy you have refused her will be refused to you!”

He was not angry with her; he seemed to understand the outraged sense of her motherhood within her.

“You have heard what she said. Oh, John, *and you stood still!* You did not stretch out a hand to her! If you were the man I once thought you to be, John, you would cross the sea and seek out the young man, and you would teach him what English fathers think of French marriage laws!”

“She chose between us,” he said, hardening his heart against this last appeal, which touched his honor so closely. “I had loved her, cherished her, worked for her all my life, and she had not known him long; when she weighed us both in the balance it was the father she gave up, not the lover.”

“But you will help her now?” she cried, in a very passion of earnestness. “You must, you cannot remain silent and passive, while those who are her enemies take her fair name and her husband from her; you cannot let her go a stranger into a strange land. I knew there was danger, and the danger is worse than death. Oh, John Derwent, save your daughter, save my child. You will be worse than a murderer if you do not help her now.”

“I shall not help her,” he said, more sternly than ever. “Let her abide by her choice,” and when Mrs. Derwent heard those words she fell to the ground like one stricken dead.

He raised her, he soothed her, he was kindness and gentleness itself to her, but he would not listen to the name again.

And when it was quite early in the morning he went out, and he was seen no more at Allan Mill that day.

CHAPTER L.

MADAME LA COMTESSE DE SOLDANA slept well. She was quite content with the aspect of affairs, and when, late in the morning, she awoke, she was in no hurry to go down to the pretty little sitting-room. There was nothing more to arrange, she told herself, but Lima's future; where she should live, and what she should have to live upon, were minor matters that could be settled in one half hour. She rang for the little maid to bring her some tea, she asked if the mistress of the house were down-stairs yet, and was told — for Jean had no idea that Lima had left the house — she believed her to be still sleeping in her room.

“Do not disturb her for me,” said madame, grandly. “I am glad she is resting.”

A faint smile curled her proud lips. The news she had brought could not have been so terrible, after all, to her, if she could sleep so soundly and so long. It was not so much of a victory after all.

“If I had known or guessed that she would have taken it so easily as to sleep after it, I should not have troubled myself with this long journey; one of the lawyers would have done just as well.”

Madame looked round the little room. No one loved comfort and luxury more than she did; she felt a longing desire to get away, now that her work was done; she missed all the warmth and splendor of her own home.

It was pretty, this little cottage-home, but how out of place her princely son must have looked here, just as Lima, who was beautiful exceedingly, would be quite out of place as mistress of Belle d'Or.

She went down-stairs, but the only sound she heard

was the little maid singing in the parlor; a bright fire burned, and the neat little breakfast still stood untouched on the table.

“She sleeps well,” said madame, with contempt in her face. “I need not have been alarmed.”

She sat in silence for some time, trying to realize what life must have been like for her son when he was here. Then she began to feel nervous about the time; she looked at her little jewelled watch; it was nearly one, and the carriage was to be there by two; there was still the conversation to finish. She rang once more for the little maid, who came in, looking more astonished and frightened at her mysterious visitor than ever.

“I want to see your mistress before I go,” she said, “and I am going very soon. Will you go to her room and tell her that I am waiting for her?”

With a deep courtesy Jean hastened away; in a few moments she returned.

“She is not there, ma’am,” said Jean.

“Not there?” repeated madame. “Then you must find her; she must be somewhere.”

But Jean looked far more inclined to cry than to search for her mistress.

“I have not seen her, ma’am,” she said, “all this morning. She gets up before me, and goes out; but this morning I have not seen her.”

“Has she had any tea?” asked madame, looking at the untouched breakfast-table.

“No,” was the answer, and madame frowned impatiently.

“You must find her,” she cried. “Time passes quickly.”

“You must find her at once,” for it had not dawned across madame’s mind that Lima had really gone. She must be somewhere — gone into the garden or the town. She would soon be back—if not, why she, madame, must wait.

Jean returned.

“I have been in the garden,” she said, “but my mistress is not there.”

“You must look for her until you find her,” said

Madame la Comtesse, sharply ; "and remember, when you speak to me, you must call me 'Madame !'"

She tried to sit still, but every nerve was on the tension ; she took up a book, but found it impossible to read.

"Just what one might have expected," she thought ; "ill-bred, unmannerly, to go out and leave me in this fashion. She ought to have shown me more respect. I shall tell her what I think of her."

No Lima came. The clock struck one. Madame sat for another hour, working herself up to a perfect fury ; there was no one to visit it on but the weeping Jean. Two o'clock, and the carriage came. Another storm of angry questions, to which Jean could make no answer.

Her mistress never visited any one ; it was not likely that she had gone to spend the day with any friends ; she had not seen her mistress since last night ; she did not know one single place where she could go to find her ; all of which answers to madame's peremptory questions the little maid gave with many tears.

Suddenly, like a flash of lightning, the thought came to madame, the suspicion, the idea, that Lima had gone to her husband. She had said over and over again that she would believe this story from no other lips but his, and now the chances were that she had gone to him.

"Go upstairs at once," said madame to the trembling Jean, "and see if your mistress has slept in her room."

Jean returned more frightened than ever, to say "No," and then madame was quite sure. She blamed herself that she had not thought of it before—that she had wasted all this time in supine silence. She took from her travelling-bag a time-table and opened it quickly. She found that if Lima had left Lynn Railway Station by the train that passed through at six o'clock she would be able to reach Dover in time for the boat which left at noon. The next thing obviously was to go to the station and make inquiries there. Yes, the ticket-clerk remembered a young lady had purchased a third-class ticket, and had gone to London by the six o'clock train. He knew her quite well. She was the miller's daughter, known as the Belle of Lynn.

Madame had felt sure of it. While she was sleeping calmly, thinking her cares and troubles were ended, Lima was leaving home to go in search of her husband.

“What will happen in France?” was her first thought. If this girl, with her fragile, delicate loveliness and her passionate love for Leon, managed to see him, there was no answering for what might happen. Madame had begun to understand that, with all his physical beauty and his princely bearing, there was more than a tinge of weakness in her son’s character. She knew that he was easily influenced. Princess Helene had almost influenced him to make him fall deeply in love with her; no doubt Lima, with her beauty and her love, would influence him again. It was just possible that on her return to France she would find all that she had done undone, and the idea made her wroth exceedingly. To think that she, the Comtesse de Soldana, should be outwitted by a lowly born English girl. To think that she should have been so completely off her guard as never even to have thought of this.

One thing was quite certain; she must hasten home to Paris as quickly as rail and steam could carry her. She might be too late to prevent any mischief, or she might be in time, but she would hasten as quickly as she could.

But to her intense annoyance and mortification, she found that she could not start for Paris before midnight. Do as she would, travel as she would, Lima must be twenty-four hours in Paris before she could reach there.

In twenty-four hours what mischief could be done; what a wreck could be made of all her plans and arrangements! What changes could be wrought by the appearance of a beautiful young girl who was a wife in England and no wife in France!

Madame la Comtesse had never been so angry. After all her diplomacy, her trouble, her fatigue, her mission was a dead failure. She had made matters worse; she had driven Lima back to her husband’s arms, when she had intended to part them forever. Nothing could exceed her anger and impatience.

But in her wildest thoughts she never dreamed of the

reality ; in her most fearful forebodings she never anticipated anything so terrible as the tragedy which had happened, and which she was soon to know.

CHAPTER LI

A DREAM of pain ? A long trance of what was like helpless, hopeless despair, a dream of which the commencement was the walk from the cottage at Lynn to the mill at Allan Water. To Lima it seemed now a certainty that her father's curse had fallen upon her, and that unless it were removed no good could ever come to her in life again. She would go to him and ask him. She knew that he would not be reconciled to her, that he would not admit her within the threshold, but he would surely recall this terrible curse which was already withering her life away. She knew that the whole place would be in silence and darkness, but surely if she stood under the alder-trees where she had played so often when she was a child, and called to her mother, her voice would be heard. So the first part of that long and terrible dream was the walk from the cottage at Lynn to the mill, through the cold darkness, with the wind wailing and moaning and the white clouds hurrying overhead. It was a dream, too, when she stood under the alder-trees, and cried out to her mother ; when standing there by the water's side she heard her father's voice, his reproaches, his angry words, his stern refusal to take back from her the curse which he had laid on her. As she listened to them each word seemed to enter her heart and leave there a burning brand.

There was no pardon, no pity for her, even in her dream. She looked lovingly at the old home, she stooped down and filled her hand with the clear, cold water that ran from the mill stream, kissed it and threw it back again. The words of the old ballad came back to her mind—

“On the banks of Allan Water
 Where the sweet spring-tide did fall,
 Was the miller’s lovely daughter,
 Fairest of them all.
 For a bride a soldier wooed her,
 And a winning tongue had he—
 On the banks of Allan Water
 None so gay as she.”

The words seemed to beat through her brain. Ah! sweet summer night, when she had sung them, and her lover had listened.

Then she left the old home, the mill stream, the banks of Allan water, and walked to the railway station at Lynn.

There was no sign of morning dawn in the sky when she reached the station. She waited there until the train for London came and then she took her seat in it.

A dream of a long, cold journey, of strange faces and loud voices, of stopping at dreary stations, and loud bangings of the carriage-doors—a dream of a kindly woman’s face looking in her own, and a voice saying, “My dear, how very ill you look. Can I do anything for you?” Then she found herself shivering on the platform of Dover railway station, looking around her with bewildered eyes. She had travelled so little in her life, that she was lost and bewildered.

Above all, the terrible, burning pain, in her heart deadened her senses. She could neither hear nor see; there was a mist before her eyes, and a rush as of many waters in her ears.

There are some good Samaritans left in the world; one came to her aid now; a tall, soldierly looking man, who had been watching her for some short time, and saw that she was quite incapable of taking care of herself. He went up to her and asked her where she was going, and she answered, “To Paris.” She saw no intermediate place. She never thought of Dover or Calais; she was going to Paris, to Leon.

“Let me help you,” said the good Samaritan. “You seem ill and bewildered.”

She did not seem to think it strange that any one should address her, should get her ticket, inquire if she had any

luggage, bring her a cup of hot, strong coffee, find her a place on deck, and then, like a true knight and gentleman that he was, leave her without waiting for one word of thanks, and watched over her from a distance. Then came a dream of the heaving, restless sea, a blue sky, a cold wind; of waves that ran quickly, of sun that shone without warmth, and all the time the sword in her heart was making deeper and deeper wounds. The waves and the sky, the wind that freshened the water, the cries of the sailors, all seemed to her part of the dream.

She could not tell afterward whether it had been a dream, a vision, or a reality; whether the waves had lulled her to sleep, or whether her spirit left her tired, wearied body, and went back to the banks of Allan Water; but she was standing there in the sweet summer time when the lime-trees were in full leaf, and Leon, her lover, held her hands clasped in his, and she was telling him of a dream she had had — a dark, terrible dream, in which he had left her — had gone to France and was never returning to her more.

The winds blew colder, and the waves rushed by the boat; she wakes, sighs, and once more the wind lulls her to sleep. She is in a boat on Allan Water, and Leon is rowing. She asks him to get some water-lilies for her, and he rows right into the midst of them; she sees him bending over them, gathering them for her, and she hears him tell her that no lily that ever grew on water or on land was half so fair as she; he bends down to kiss her and she sits silently, happy, in the warmth of that caress: a breath of wind, a rush of the swelling waves, then she dreams again.

She is at home in the little parlor at Sweetbrier Cottage; the great red roses are nodding in at the window; the air is full of the odor of flowers; Leon sits in his favorite chair reading, and she near to him.

“The Soldanas were a great race,” he said, “a race of cavaliers, but I am the happiest Soldana of them all, because I have you, Lima—losing all else, I have you,” and she kissed, in a fervor of love, the handsome face that did not seem to have one line of falsity in it. Then she was

with him at Lynn Railway Station ; he was caressing and consoling her.

" I shall not be long away, my darling," he was saying. " I shall be with you again before the leaves are on the trees."

The train steams out of the station, and to the last he watches her with loving eyes.

Let the wind blow and the mad waves rush on, she would be mad as they to doubt that he loved her after all these proofs of love ; wait until she stood before him, held out her arms to him, cried out to him that she was there ; nothing could come between them then.

So the long dream of a journey went on, and Calais was reached at last. She stood on the quay there, dazed and bewildered as she had been at Dover, and the same good Samaritan went to her assistance.

" You are going on to Paris," he said ; " let me find a comfortable seat for you."

He placed her in a carriage, he tried to talk to her, but he saw her senses were so dazed she neither saw nor heard him.

Many a long day afterward the good Samaritan thought of that beautiful colorless face with the burning eyes, which seemed ever looking for that which she did not find.

" That girl will have brain-fever soon," he said to himself, but there was a far more terrible fate than brain-fever hanging over Lima.

Then comes a rush through the gathering darkness as the train speeds on its way to Paris. The carriage is quite full, but she is as much alone as though she were travelling in the desert of Sahara. Her companions were all so many shadows to her. They spoke French and English, but she never distinguished one word they said. She was going to Paris to find Leon and ask him if there was any truth in the cruel story.

Then she stands alone in the great crowded railway station. No child could be more helpless, more inexperienced. In her highly strung nervous state she fancied the roar of the steam was the sound of falling water, Allan Water. She stood amongst the crowd, her colorless face and motionless figure attracting no little atten-

tion, but she had not the least idea where to go or what to do. Once more the good Samaritan came to her, and she raised her poor dazed eyes to his face.

"Have you no one to meet you?" he asked.

"No," she answered, as though his question had surprised her into sudden life, "no one."

"Can I help you? Can I do anything for you?" he asked. "You want to go somewhere. You cannot stand here in this crowd, you look dazed and ill. Child, you remind me of one of my own daughters at home. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing," she answered, slowly. "You might perhaps tell me one thing. If you came a stranger here to Paris, and you wanted to find one person living here, what should you do?"

"You want to find some one," he said, quickly. "Have you no address?"

"No," she replied.

"Then your best plan will be to go to a bookseller's shop, and ask to see a directory of Paris; you will be sure to find name and address there."

"Thank you," she said, simply.

"I advise you," he continued, "to go to some hotel close to hand here and rest some hours. You look ill and tired, as though you wanted rest."

He raised his hat, and was leaving her with a profound bow, when she held out her hand to him.

"You have been very kind to me," she said; "I ought to thank you—I do thank you with all my heart. I did not know what to do, and now I shall be all right."

"I'm glad to have been of service to you. You see that you are near to the Hotel du Chemin de Fer du Nord. You will be most comfortable there. Good-bye."

Soon afterward she was in one of the best rooms of the large hotel, and then it seemed to her that she had reached the crisis. She must wait for the full light and sunshine of the day before she could go in search of Leon.

CHAPTER LII.

NEVER was man so unhappy as the Count de Soldana, never was man in so terrible a dilemma; never was man so tempted, first one way, then another; he could not rest or sleep, nothing gave him pleasure, nothing interested him; the only time he forgot himself and his cares was when he was *tête-à-tête* with Princess Helene — then she charmed all care away. He tried to make himself believe when he was under her influence that he was doing the right thing, and that, even if he loved Lima more than he did, he was bound to sacrifice her and carry out the course his mother had laid down for him.

Every hour that he remained in France bound him more closely to his country, his home, and his friends; every hour that passed made him dislike more than ever the idea of returning to England, poverty, and exile.

If she had been less fair, less gentle, less loving, he would not have felt it so keenly, and disguise it as he would, he did feel keenly; every moment of his mother's absence his thoughts followed her. How would Lima bear it? What would she do or say?

He never dreamed that she would come to him. If, in his fancy, he saw her acquiesce in his mother's plans — relinquish him, take the income his mother offered her, make a new home and a new life for herself, then his heart grew heavy and sad, and he felt that he could do anything rather than lose her; if, in his fancy, he saw her resisting his mother, refusing to comply with her arrangements, refusing to give him up, resolving upon making a claim for her rights, then he grew disturbed at the prospect of losing the magnificent future that lay before him.

"Was there ever," he asked himself, "a man so tossed in doubt, so weak of mind and purpose, so easily influenced, so easily led?"

There were times when he scorned and loathed himself. It was the morning of the day after his mother had left; he knew that she had, by this time, fulfilled her mission;

she had spent the night in the old house he had loved so well once; by this time Lima knew that the marriage between them was null and void; that although she was his wife in England, she never could be his wife in France. He little dreamed that she was, even then, on her way to him; he thought it possible that, in her sorrow and her anger, she might go home to her father's house; but he never, for one moment, dreamed that she would go to him.

He wished that he had asked his mother to telegraph to him. He could not possibly hear from her that day by letter, he knew, and the day would be one of terrible suspense to him. He decided to spend some part of it with Princess Helene; she would cheer and amuse him at least.

He found her highly excited and delighted at the idea of a grand masquerade to which she was going, a masquerade given by Mme. de Lisle, one of the most brilliant leaders of Parisian society.

"You will go, Leon," she said. "I shall not enjoy it if you do not, and I know you have an invitation."

He did not feel much inclined for a masquerade, but this fair princess of his was somewhat peremptory.

"What is your costume?" he asked.

Princess Helene laughed.

"The most picturesque I could find," she answered. "I am going as the wife of an Albanian chief, and my costume will be complete. I have even ordered a beautiful little dagger with a jewelled hilt."

"Rather a dangerous toy," he said, carelessly.

"Not in my hands," said Princess Helene. "Will you go, Leon?" she added.

"Is it to-morrow evening?" he asked, little dreaming what the morrow evening would bring forth for him.

"Yes," she answered. "You should go as an Albanian chief, Leon. It is a most picturesque costume, and it would just suit your superb style. I should like to see you."

"I will think about it," he replied, languidly. "I should imagine that if it be known you are going as a chieftainess there will be many chieftains."

"It may be so," she replied, with a little musical laugh.

He said to himself that he should know his fate by to-morrow evening; he should know what was to become of Lima, and with his mind at ease he could better endure the masquerade.

Princess Helene was delighted with his ready acquiescence; he was growing fonder of her, that was clear, and under the influence of that belief she grew more loving and more bewitching in her manner to him.

He forgot his cares for a time; he forgot everything except the beautiful girl who was as clever as she was beautiful; she had the happy and most rare faculty of making the hours pass like minutes, as they did to him now.

Mme. Vesey pressed him to remain to dine with them and stay for the evening; some friends were coming, and she knew that he would be well amused.

"You are very kind to me, and I am well amused here always," he said. "How could I be anything else?"

The evening did pass most pleasantly, and when it was ended Princess Helene was more passionately in love than ever with him.

"I am *the* happiest girl in the whole wide world," she said, "for I am going to marry the man I love and who loves me," she said to Mme. Vesey. "I wonder when I look round on the fate of other girls who marry without love, I wonder what I have done that I should be so fortunate."

"I am glad you are happy," said madame, gravely. Love and passion always frightened her.

It was early in the morning when the young Comte de Soldana reached home; he had walked for some long time, knowing well the only thing that could make him sleep was great fatigue.

If he had known that Lima was even then in Paris his rest would have been more broken still.

So little did he dream what the day held! There was no letter from his mother; his only resource was to go, as he had done before, to Princess Helene.

"It is in Madame's boudoir, Leon," she cried; "come and see it."

"Madame's boudoir" was by no means especially reserved for herself. It was used for visitors, and Princess Helene preferred it to any other apartment in the mansion. The view from the window over the bright Champs Elysees was simply charming; winter though it was, the room was filled with fairest flowers, and their sweet perfume filled the air.

All the rich and beautiful fabrics of the costumes were lying there, and Princess Helene, usually too proud to think much of dress, was delighted to draw the young count's attention to the picturesque attire, which so perfectly suited her picturesque beauty.

"And here," she said, "is a triumph of art. You see the place in this exquisite crimson scarf for this dagger, that is how they are worn — but did you ever see anything so beautiful?"

He took the little dagger from her hand to examine it. It was made of polished silver, the blade thin and sharp, the handle richly jewelled.

"I should not like to wear such a thing," he said, thoughtfully. "It looks to me much more like death than play."

Princess Helene was amused.

"What a disagreeable word to use about my dagger, and, excuse me, what nonsense. Many of the ladies of olden days carried daggers."

"It is to be hoped they made little use of them," he replied.

She looked up at him quickly.

"Leon, you do not like my costume," she said.

"I do, all but the dagger," he answered. "I cannot tell why, but it has given me a shock. Pretty as it is, and richly jewelled, I cannot think of it as a plaything."

"My costume would not be complete without it," she said, "or I would not wear it. I have lost all pleasure in it now. I will think about it."

She laid the little dagger down on the table, amidst the flowers and laces, and there she left it.

Mme. Vesey came to say that, as the day was so fine,

they would all enjoy a drive. The young count cried out that if Princess Helene approved, it was the very thing that he should like. It would pass away the tedious hours of that tedious day, he thought.

He followed madame and Princess Helene into the carriage just as Lima, following the advice given to her, had gone into a stationer's shop and asked for a directory of Paris. The keeper of the shop, struck by her beautiful face, assisted her. It was not long before she found out where the Hôtel d'Or was.

"How shall I get there?" she asked. "I have never travelled—never been in big cities before."

"Have you no one with you to take care of you?" he asked.

"No, I am quite alone, I have a relative living at the Hôtel d'Or."

She longed to say "My husband lives there," but she remembered the words of madame—"A wife in England, but no wife in France."

"You will be all right, then, when you reach the Hôtel d'Or. If I may be allowed to express an opinion, it is not safe for a girl so young and so fair to be alone in the streets of Paris. The safest thing for you is to take a carriage, and drive to the Hôtel d'Or. I will send for one for you, and see you safely in it."

She thanked him and for many a long day afterward the shop-keeper thought of that beautiful face which he never saw again, and wondered what was the history of that lonely, lovely girl.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE young count remained after the drive to take luncheon with Mme. Vesey and Princess Helene. He felt better; the fresh, cold air, the brilliant sunshinc, the conversation, so witty and piquant, all combined, had brightened his spirits. Then Princess Helene loved him so; like most very proud women, when she did descend to love any one, her love had neither limit nor bounds. Just as she was proud and reticent with others, she was loving and gentle with him. She, who ruled others imperiously, yielded to his least wish; she, who would have borne herself proudly even in the presence of crowned kings, was all that was humble and graceful to him. She had but one thought, and it was to make him love her more and more. She said to herself that she would never rest until she had his whole heart in her keeping. To attain that end she made herself more charming, and by the time the drive was ended he thought much more of her and more kindly than when it began; he was nearer being in love with her than he had ever been. He said to himself as he hastened home, that he hoped there was news from his mother and that she had been able to make suitable arrangements with Lima. It was the first time that, even to his own heart, he had expressed or allowed such a wish.

The good-bye after luncheon was over had been delightful.

"We have quite fallen into the English practice of shaking hands," said Princess Helene, as she held out to him a beautiful hand, white and jewelled, with slender fingers and pink, pretty palm.

"It is a most delightful fashion," he answered, holding that lovely white hand in his, and then he kissed it, and over that proud, beautiful face came such a look of delight that he relinquished the hand, and bending down, kissed the exquisite lips; then, he could hardly remember

how it happened, he folded his arms round her, and drew her to his breast.

“ My love, my love ! ” he heard her murmur, and then he knew that he had won her heart for evermore.

“ I shall not have made such a terrible failure after all,” he said. “ I shall be able to make this one woman perfectly happy.”

He would have given anything in that hour never to have seen the banks of Allan Water or the fair face that had shone on him there.

It was nearly four in the afternoon when he reached the Hôtel d’Or. His first and most eager question was whether any telegrams had arrived. The answer was “ No.” Were there any letters from England ? Quick, bring in the salver on which they lay ! No English letters ; and for a few moments his heart ached horribly with the disappointment ; then he reassured himself by thinking it would all come right on the morrow ; his mother would probably return then, and he must live through the suspense as well as he could. He should not be alone, for Mme. Vesey had asked him to return and to dine with them. Then he saw the footman looking at him with a strange glance.

“ Monsieur le Comte,” he said, “ a lady is here and wishes to see you.”

“ A lady,” he repeated, “ to see me ? Did you say that Madame le Comtesse was not at home ? ”

“ The lady did not ask for her, monsieur ; only for you.”

“ Where is she ? ” he asked, indifferently ; he gave but a passing thought as to whom it might be ; some one on business or on a charitable round.

The lady was in the white saloon, a magnificent room, so called because the carpet was of white velvet pile, and the hangings of white velvet looped with golden tassels and fringe.

It was tiresome enough to have a lady calling upon him, but she would not remain long ; he should soon be back with Princess Helene.

He opened the door slowly, without the faintest thought or least suspicion as to who was there.

A tall figure rose as he entered ; he bowed, and the next moment he found himself face to face with Lima.

“ Good Heavens ! ” he cried, and she, looking with grave sweet eyes in his face, said, “ Leon, I have come to see you, since you would not return to me.”

They did not meet as lovers, or as husband and wife ; both faces had grown white, and the man’s strong figure trembled.

“ Have you no welcome for me, my husband ? ” she asked, and he winced at the sound of the word, “ have you no welcome when I have come so far ? Let me look at you, Leon. Ah, Heaven ! you are *not* the same. Have you no smiles, no kisses, no kind words ; have you nothing to say to me ? You have no love, no light of welcome in your eyes, you have no word on your lips. Oh, Leon, what has come to you — you loved me so dearly once ; do you remember ? and now — ”

The torrent of passionate words ceased abruptly, and she stood before him white and trembling, her eyes filled with burning fire.

He spoke slowly :

“ You have taken me so completely by surprise, Lima, I hardly know what to say.”

Her eyes seemed to flash with hot indignation into his.

“ You do not know what to say ? You have been away from me a year. You loved me when you left me, and now you are taken by surprise and do not know what to say. Better kill me at once than use such words to me. It seems to me hardly possible that you can be my Leon, or that I can be your wife. You do not know what to say to me ; it is the first time — my love ! my love ! — that words have failed you. You had plenty, and they were loving enough, on the banks of Allan Water. You do not know what to say to me. Oh, Leon, Leon ! why did you not open your arms to me when you first saw me and cry out to me, ‘ My wife, my darling, I am glad to see you ? ’ ”

She drew nearer to him, and looked with despairing eyes in his face.

“ You have ceased to love me,” she said. “ Oh, Heaven, let me die ! There is no love left for me in

your eyes, Leon ; none in your face ; your hands have no warm clasp left for me ; your heart has gone from me. Let me die ! ”

“ Lima,” he cried, “ it is not so, but you know — you have heard — what stands between us.”

“ Nothing can stand between us,” she answered. “ God hath joined us — no man, no law, can put us asunder.”

“ I would that it were so,” he said. “ You have seen my mother, Lima ? ”

“ Yes, I have seen her,” was the reply.

“ And she has told you all ? ” he asked.

“ She has told me all, and I have refused to believe the story from any lips but yours,” she replied.

“ It is true, Lima,” he said, sadly.

“ How much of it is true ? ” she asked, and the change from loving humility to passionate scorn shocked him.

“ What of it is true ? ” she continued. “ Is it true that the wealth and honors of your ancestors have all been given back to you ? ”

“ All, and more,” he answered.

“ Is it true that your marriage with me is invalid, that by some cruel law I am your wife in England, but not in France ? ”

“ It is perfectly true,” he repeated.

“ Is it true that you intend to abide by this infamous law ? That, after marrying me in accordance with the laws of my own native land, and in the presence of Heaven — remember that ! — is it true that you intend to set that marriage aside as null and void ? ”

“ What can I do, Lima ? ” he cried. “ Try to realize the position ; I did not seek it. When I married you, I had no idea that such a law was in existence.”

“ Why need you think of it now ? ” she asked.

“ You do not realize it, Lima,” he replied. “ Indeed, it was some time before I realized it myself. You are my wife in England ; here, in France, a marriage with you could never take place, because my mother refuses her sanction ; railing against the law is useless, because it stands, and we must abide by it.”

“ Come back to England, then, and live there ; we were

happy enough — come back, Leon. It says in the good old Book which gave the first laws, that 'a man must forsake all and cleave unto his wife.' Can any law that men may make undo that? Come back to England; we were happy; you loved me there; you said I made your happiness. Come back, and let us be happy again."

"Do you know, Lima," he asked, coldly, "all that it would cost me to go back with you and live in England?"

"I do not know," she replied, "nor does it matter."

"It matters greatly to me," said the Count de Soldana.

"What is the cost?" she asked.

"First and foremost, France. I should have to give up all thoughts of my native land. If I lived here you would not be my wife, and nothing could legalize the tie between us. No children of yours could succeed me; the estate and title and all the honors would lapse upon the Soldanas. Do you see, Lima — it means France, wealth, honors, title, without you; or England, exile, and poverty with you."

"I see — I understand," she replied. "Do you hesitate between the two? Answer me, Leon."

"I do hesitate," he answered, slowly. "I love you. I acknowledge the sanctity of the tie that binds us together, although it is not a legal one. I do hesitate, for I love France, I love my race, my lands, my honors, all of which I must lose if I go back to England with you."

Her face was as white as that of a dead woman as she drew nearer to him, and the light that burned in her eyes was terrible to see.

"You have to choose between France and me; you choose France?"

"How can I help it?" he replied.

"Answer me — yes or no. You choose France and wealth—not me?"

"I choose France," he said; "there is no alternative. You must see for yourself, Lima, I cannot help it."

"And you give me up?" she continued. "You are content to see what is in my own land an honorable marriage set aside?"

"I cannot help it," he answered her. "Never was

man in so cruel a dilemma before ; my very heart is torn and divided, Lima."

" And I," she said, slowly, " once thought that the whole of it was mine."

CHAPTER LIV.

" I LOVE you, Lima!" cried the Count de Soldana. " So long as life lasts I shall love no other woman but you."

" Then, if you love me, be true to me, Leon ; give up everything else and come back to England with me. I will make you as happy as you were before."

He was silent for some few minutes, then he said, slowly : " Lima, I have not the courage, I confess to you, frankly, I have not the courage to do it. I do not think that any man living could give up so much for love. If I had never known this life—its ease, pleasures, luxuries, and its high ambitions, I might have lived and died content in exile and poverty ; but, having known this I candidly confess I could not go back to the other."

" Not even with me?" she said, softly.

" No," he replied, " although it sounds selfish and cruel, not even with you, Lima. I do not believe that any man living would give up so much for a woman's love."

" I would have given up far more for love of you," she said.

" Love is a woman's life," he replied ; " it is but one phase of a man's existence."

" And with you, Leon, that phase is past?" she said, sadly.

" My dear Lima, that is a terrible question for you to ask, and equally terrible for me to answer. Still, it is better that I should answer it. Yes, that phase is past for me, I could not now sacrifice every hope in life for love, it would not content me. Do not misunderstand me," he continued, eagerly. " I regret with passionate sorrow this has happened. I should be the happiest man in the world if I could take you to my home and my

heart, if I could share all I have with you, if I could proclaim you as my wife to the whole world; but the law is against me, I cannot do it. There is no way by which I can make you my wife legally in France except by my mother's consent, and that she will never give — she triumphs in withholding it. As I cannot do what I fain would, I must do what is best for the good of my race.

“And I must be sacrificed,” she said, slowly.

“How can I help it, Lima? I would never have given you up of my own accord; I would never have left you; I would never have caused you one minute's sorrow or pain. It is not I who do it; it is the law, a cruel, unjust, wicked law, if you will, but still the law, and I cannot control it. If I could, I would.”

“And this same law which separates you from your lawful wife permits you to marry another,” she said.

“This same law does not admit that I am a married man at all; it refuses to acknowledge my marriage—”

“Leon,” she interrupted, “does not the old love plead for me?”

“It does, and the present love pleads for you also; but what can I do, Lima? There is no help for me.”

“You will not give all up and return with me?”

“*I cannot*,” he answered.

“You will let me, whom you have loved so much, pass out of your life, and know me no more?”

His face had grown deadly pale, and his lips quivered with pain, still he answered :

“It must be so, Lima.”

She was silent for some five minutes, then she said, hurriedly :

“Your mother, who spared me no pain and no insult, who seemed to think that I belonged to a class entirely without feeling, told me that you were going to marry some one in your own class of life; the most beautiful girl and the wealthiest heiress in France. I, your wife, according to the law of England and the law of Heaven, ask you, is it true?”

His face grew crimson with shame, his eyes dim with the sense of his own unworthiness.

"Is it true?" she repeated.

"It has been thought best that I should do so," he replied. "A man in my position—the head of a great race, of a great house—must marry. I must have a beautiful wife; I must have children to succeed me."

"Answer my question, 'Yes' or 'No,'" she said. "Are you going to marry that lady of whom your mother spoke? 'Yes' or 'No'?"

"Yes," he said; and if with his own hand he had taken a dagger and plunged it into her heart, she could not have shrunk back from him more scared and trembling.

"What shall I be if you marry her?" she asked.

"You could never be my wife in France."

Then the whole passion of Lima's nature, never aroused in her life before, was aroused at last.

A rich color rushed to her delicate face; her eyes grew bright; her lost beauty seemed to return in redoubled force.

"It shall not be!" she said; "I will prevent it. You are mine—my own husband. I claim you before Heaven and man! No other woman shall have you! You are mine by every right—by right of my great love for you, by right of your love for me, by right of a legal and religious ceremony. *I am your wife*—you shall have none other! I appeal," she continued, passionately, "to Heaven itself against you! I appeal to all honorable men! I appeal to the whole wide world! I say that it shall not be!"

He cowered under that torrent of passionate words—he shrunk from the fire in those eyes.

"I will reproach you no more, I will plead to you no more. *I will defy you*. I claim my rights, my share in your name, in your title, in your wealth, in your honors, in your heart, and in your love. You cannot—you dare not—deny my claim."

"I do not—the law does," he answered.

"A paltry, miserable subterfuge," she cried, "behind which you hide yourself to do a dishonorable deed. I defy the law, even as I defy you. I will fight it to the bitter end. You shall put no other woman in my place."

You shall take no other woman in your arms and call her wife. You shall kiss no other woman's face and say that you love her. I, Lima, your true and lawful wife, swear that this shall never be done."

"Oh, Lima!" he sighed, "if I could but make you understand."

"I know enough," she cried, haughtily. "I am poor and lowly born. I belong to a class which, according to your mother's ideas, can be trampled under-foot, a class which has no rights, no claims, no feeling. What will my blighted life and broken heart matter to any of you? Who will care that I spend the rest of it under the blackest shadow of shame, betrayed and deserted—who cares? But it shall not be. I appeal to Heaven against it. I will defend, and shield, and protect myself, since there is no one to do it for me."

She had never looked so beautiful as she did in this hour of passionate defiance and pain. He could not answer her, he had no words to say.

"You think," she continued, "that because I am of lowly birth, 'only a miller's daughter,' that I can be trampled on, hidden, thrust out of the way, while you marry the most beautiful girl in France. Oh! God of Justice, I cry to you! I cry to you! And this is what your love has brought me," she cried. "For you I left home, mother and father; you repay me by deserting me. My father's words have come true: the curse of the disobedient has followed me, and will cling to me wherever I go."

She wrung her hands with a gesture of passionate despair.

"I will appeal to the whole wide world against you," she continued. "Your mother thinks and you think that because I am of lowly birth I am easily crushed, easily hidden out of sight, that for paltry money I shall consent to forego my claim. I will not, I will fight for it until I die, and the whole world shall hear of it. It shall be no secret bought and paid for. If you persist in it you shall know what you are doing. So shall she, the partner of your crime—for it is a crime. Since I have been here in Paris, I know her name—Helene de Saison, I know.

even your name for her—Princess Helene. I shall go to her; I shall tell her the whole of my love-story; I shall tell her of your love, your wooing, and of our marriage. Then when she knows that I am your lawful wife—when she knows that I have had the best love of your heart and you of mine, she will refuse you and send you back to me. If she be a true woman worthy of love she will spurn you. I shall go to her and tell her all."

"Lima, be reasonable," he cried out, in an agony of fear.

"I have been reasonable, patient, submissive, and supine long enough. I will be so no longer; I will fight it out. I have no money, few friends; but I have a will. If I have to appeal to the emperor himself, it shall be done."

The very thought almost stopped the beating of his heart. That would be the most complete, black, bitter thing that could befall him.

"What can I say to you?" he cried. "There is so much truth and reason in what you say—you have so much right on your side. I am so heartily ashamed of it all, and yet I could not go back to poverty and exile."

"Then you must be prepared to take the consequences," she said, and without another word she left him. She did not wait to say good-by; she had borne as much as she could bear. She would have gone mad or died if she had remained there.

The probability is that she did go mad then and there, that she lost the balance of brain and reason never to regain it. She rushed from his presence, her eyes could look no longer on the handsome face of the man whom she loved with all her heart, but who was going to sacrifice her. She went away so quickly that he had no time to see in what direction she fled. She was gone even before he had time to recover himself.

If he had known, he would have followed her—but he did not know.

CHAPTER LV.

PRINCESS HELENE sat with a smile on her face, going over in thought every word her lover had said to her, every caress he had given her, happier than words can tell, happier than she had ever dreamed of being.

She never even gave a thought to the fact that her happiness was purchased by the misery of another. At the time of a great famine in France, a princess expressed her wonder that people should starve, and when told that they could not buy bread, she said, "Why can they not live on buns?" Princess Helene had ideas just as vague about people of the class beneath her.

She never thought of them as loving, suffering, feeling keenly, as sensitive and full of fine instincts; they were simply the lower classes, and that one of this class would ever dare to rise up and claim that to which she also laid claim was an idea that never, ever so faintly, occurred to her. She had thought very little of this young English person. She supposed that all young men had some awkward *contretemps* in life. It need not concern her. She did not even take the trouble to think of it.

She had gone back to madame's boudoir, and stood with a smile on her face looking at the superb costume that still lay there, the cloth of silver, the rich jewels and the shining dagger. She was well pleased with them all and he admired them, that was the crowning beauty. What a pleasant evening lay before her—he would be there.

There was only one in the world for her.

"How little I ever thought I should learn to love him so," she said to herself. "I have actually no pride where he is concerned."

There was a rap at the door, and Susette, Princess Helene's favorite maid, came in.

"Mademoiselle," she said, softly, "a lady wishes to see you."

"A lady? What a vague expression, Susette. What lady?"

"I do not know, mademoiselle. She has no card, and she declined to give any name, but she bade me pray you, mademoiselle, most earnestly to see her. She says that her business is of most supreme importance."

"Is she young or old, Susette?" asked Princess Helene.

"Young, mademoiselle, and beautiful as a picture."

"Bring her here, I will see her here," said Princess Helene, slowly.

She was not much interested, and cared but little who it was.

The next minute her eyes fell on a face which startled her, it was so rarely beautiful, yet it was colorless, worn, and haggard with pain.

Two blue eyes, more lovely than she had ever seen, were looking into her own. A lovely, delicate, fragile girl stood before her, whose hair seemed to have caught the gold of the sunlight, a girl who looked upon her with an expression on her face such as Princess Helene had never seen before.

The scene was dramatic enough; the magnificent room with its superb adornments, its wealth of luxury; the daylight was fading, and soft shadows lay in the corners; the air was heavy with perfume, and the rich blooms seemed to catch the dying light. The two beautiful girls stood facing each other: Princess Helene the ideal of magnificent beauty, Lima the picture of fair loneliness; Princess Helene, superb in her stately manner and exquisite dress—Lima, fair, fragile, with her whole soul shining in her face. For some few seconds they stood in silence looking at each other: Princess Helene startled at the stranger's beauty without dreaming who she was. Then, with the haughty manner natural to her, she said:

"You wished to see me, I believe?"

"You are Mademoiselle de Saison," said Lima. "I wish to see you—to talk to you."

"Will you take a chair if your visit is likely to be a long one?" said Princess Helene, and Lima sat down.

Princess Helene flung herself haughtily into the

nearest chair. Who was this beautiful girl and what did she want?

It was not so easy, now that she was face to face with this magnificent woman, to begin; but Lima must tell what she came to tell.

"Mademoiselle," said she, "I am an English girl; my name was Lima Derwent—perhaps you may have heard it?"

"No," said the princess, proudly.

"My name now," she continued, "is Lima de Soldana. I was married to Leon Comte de Soldana at the church at Haslingdene, in England—a marriage valid and legal according to the English law."

For one minute Princess Helene looked up with a dangerous flash in her eyes. She sprang from her seat, with a gesture of profound contempt, then she looked fixedly at the face before her. So this was the young English person whom she had thought of so little importance—the lovely fragile girl whose eyes were bright as stars, and whose mouth was sweeter than the sweetest rose. A hot flush of jealousy swept over her. She had not realized that this person might be young and most lovely. Her jealous eyes rested angrily on the fair face and the golden hair. If that hot, jealous glance could have slain, Lima would have died. Then, with negligent grace and *hauteur*, she resumed her place, and all trace of emotion died. She spoke with a sarcastic smile.

"If it were not," she said, "that the English are such extraordinary people, I might ask why you have come here?"

"I come here because I have been told that Count de Soldana has some thought of marrying you, mademoiselle, that his mother and his friends wish it and that he himself desires it. Mademoiselle I am here to say that you *cannot* marry him, for he is my husband, and I claim him for my own."

"I think it a most intrusive and impertinent thing for you to have come here," says Princess Helene. "I have nothing to do with it, and I must beg that the interview end now."

"But, mademoiselle, it cannot end; you must listen.

I think rather that it is you who should be ashamed in consenting to marry a man who already has a wife living who loves him."

Princess Helene smiled contemptuously.

" You are not his wife," she says. " I have heard of your story. The marriage was not legal, not binding. Such a thing has happened to girls of your class before, and probably will again. I have nothing to do with it. It does not concern me."

" Mademoiselle," cried Lima, her fair face flushed with earnestness, " this marriage shall never take place. Leon de Soldana can never be your husband, *because he is mine*. He wooed me, and married me; he loved me. Ah, if you knew how he loved *me*, *you* would never marry him. I had all his heart, I carried it in the hollow of my hand. He could never care one half so much for any human being as he did for me — never again."

" He has not shown any great love," said Princess Helene, sneeringly. " He has found out that his so-called marriage was a mistake, and he is doing his best to remedy it. It would not be fair, if a man were to suffer for a folly of that kind all his life."

" He has been badly influenced," said Lima. " Of his own free will no such cowardly or ungenerous idea would have come to him."

" I think," said Princess Helene, " that it is you who are ungenerous. You would have him give up this fair land of France, all the honors that have been given to him, all his brilliant future, and all his bright hopes, to go and live in a cottage in England with you. It is you who are ungenerous. It would be cruel so to mar his life, to ruin him, to destroy him! Cruel! You are a selfish and ungenerous woman to think of it. I shall bring him wealth, fortune, honor — every possible advantage that marriage can bring a man. *You* would ruin him!"

" He is mine, and I claim him. I love him, and he loves me!"

She could have uttered no words that would have enraged the princess more. The bitter jealousy that had lain latent in her heart rose to fury; Lima's delicate love

liness angered her, her clear, sweet voice, her grace of manner, angered her, also. Could it be possible that Count de Soldana had really loved this girl — had kissed her and caressed her even as he had done herself?"

"I should like to kill her!" thought Princess Helene.

With Lima, too, jealousy had been growing; the magnificent beauty of Mlle. de Saison and the luxury that surrounded her produced their effect.

"I have come to say that this most wicked and unnatural marriage shall never take place — that I claim my husband for my own in the face of Heaven and earth, and no other woman shall take my place!"

Princess Helene laughed, a sneering laugh which seemed to set the girl's heart on fire.

"I do not think," she replied, "that your opinion will be asked on the matter. I admit it is rather hard on you, but in affairs of this kind I believe it is always the weakest who are crushed. There are privileges of class — you enjoy none! If you are at all sensible, you will yield to any suggestions Madame de Soldana may make, and go back to England."

"Mademoiselle," cried Lima, "do you believe that my marriage was valid?"

"Do I believe it? Most certainly not. You must be mad to ask such a question!"

"Do you believe that the marriage sacred as a sacrament in England, is less sacred here?"

"It is against the law," said Princess Helene. "How can anything be sacred that is against the law? The law is the preserver of nations. And now," she continued; "I have heard enough; there need be no more said. I think your coming to see me is altogether bad taste, and I cannot help telling you so."

"It is no question of taste," said Lima. "It is a question of right and wrong — it is a question that you cannot settle, mademoiselle, by a few contemptuous words. It is a question that will look you in the face — and brand your soul with fire at the Judgment Day."

Princess Helene laughed, a sneering laugh which brought a hot flush into Lima's face.

"I shall be quite content to wait until then, and am not afraid of the consequences."

Hot anger filled Lima's heart—hot, bitter rage, so great, so terrible, that her whole body trembled with it; and so they stood for some minutes looking death or murder at each other.

CHAPTER LVI.

"MADEMOISELLE," said Lima, "you call yourself 'noble' you boast that you are descended from a long line of nobles, therefore you ought to have all noble virtues, you ought to be above all mean and ignoble ideas, above all unjust and wicked actions. Would you steal from me—would you take my money?"

And the face of Princess Helene was a study as she heard these words. Loftiest scorn, bitter anger, hot indignation, struggled for mastery.

"You will not deign to answer me," said Lima, "I will answer for you. You would rather burn off those proud hands of yours than that they should steal—and steal from me. And yet you are stealing from me that which I value far above life itself — my husband."

"He is not yours," said Princess Helene.

"He is mine," said Lima, "and no one else shall take him from me. You shall not, mademoiselle; with all your beauty, all your high birth, all your pride and grandeur, you shall not have him. If I were a great lady as you are, I would scorn to rob another girl of her husband. If you do steal him, he will never love you as he loved me. I had all the first warm love of his heart; there will not be much left for you, great lady as you are. Should you succeed, even in the very hour of your success, you will be second to me; but you will not succeed. Heaven is just! You shall not take him from me."

She paused suddenly; the sound of her own voice frightened her—it seemed to come from some far distance—and her brain whirled; nothing seemed clear to her.

"Am I going mad?" she thought to herself. "Has my misery driven me mad?"

Then to her horror she found that she could not hear what Princess Helene was saying; she could see the mocking smile on the proud face, the mocking lines round the beautiful mouth, but she could not hear a sound.

"Oh Heaven!" she cried; "I must be going mad; I cannot bear it."

There was a smile on the mocking face opposite to her, but she could not distinguish the words that came from Princess Helene's lips.

Suddenly a blood-red mist swam before her eyes, and through it she only saw the mocking beauty of that proud face; then she must have gone mad, for suddenly it seemed to her that she saw her husband by Princess Helene's side, standing there tall, erect, handsome, his face bent over the beautiful one of her rival. It was but a mad, vivid fancy—to her it was most horribly real.

They were laughing at her! Oh, Heaven, was there no justice, no mercy? Laughing at her, and he, Leon, kissed that proud face; then both turned to her with a mocking smile.

"He is mine," said Princess Helene; "all mine, you see."

Through the blood-red mist she saw the gleam of the silver dagger with the sharp, keen blade.

"He is all mine," mocked Princess Helene. "You see he loves me, he kisses me, he will never look at you again; it is you who are second, not I."

The terrible mist deepened, there was a sound in her ears as of falling waters, then came to her overstrained brain just one glimpse of cool, clear reason, and she saw there was no Leon there—only Princess Helene, looking at her with half-frightened eyes.

"You are mad," she said, sternly.

"Mad!" Ah! that was the word; the very sound of it threw her off her balance; it was the laugh of a mad woman that rang through the room. The fair distorted face was terrible to see.

"You must be taken away and locked up," said Princess Helene.

As she spoke, she moved as though she would touch the bell-rope, then complete and perfect madness took possession of the hapless girl. She seemed to look down a long vista of years, during which she would be shut away from the world, while Leon and Princess Helene were happy together.

"You shall not touch that rope," she cried, the fire of madness in her eyes — "you shall not touch it!"

"I shall ring, and have you taken away from here," said Princess Helene.

She moved again. There was a rush, a struggle, a cry, only Heaven knew how it had happened. She, who in her whole life had never given pain; she who had been tender even to dead flowers and dying leaves, who would not crush the daisies in the grass; she whose heart had ever been filled with love and tenderness for all things created; she, driven mad by mockery, by cruel words, by outraged love, by physical fatigue, by long fasting and weary travelling; she, whose hand had never been raised but in love and kindness, suddenly seized that gleaming dagger, caught the upraised arm of Princess Helene just as she was on the point of touching the bell and plunged the blade in her breast. It was but the work of a moment, and the act of one for the time being quite mad.

Then there was a cry and a fall. As suddenly as her senses had left her they came back, and she found herself bending over the fallen body of Princess Helene, with the stains of blood on her hands.

The very sight of it and the fright of it recalled her scattered senses, and she knew, she realized what she had done, and the wonder was that she did not then and there fall dead.

It was murder — cruel, terrible murder; the word seemed written in great letters of flame before her eyes; it was hissed by a hundred voices in her ears — murder, cruel, horrible murder. She gave one look at the prostrate body of her rival, at the white set face and the

wound whence flowed that terrible stream, the stain of which was on her own hands ; then she turned and fled.

She had committed murder. Rapidly as lightning flashes she made up her mind what to do. She did not look again at the terrible sight that lay on the ground : she hastily rubbed the stains from her hands and quitted the room.

“Murder ! — murder !” was the sound that followed her, as she went rapidly down the marble staircase and opened the great hall door. She met no one. She left the house quite unobserved, but it seemed to her the very moment she reached the street every one took up the cry of “murder !”

It was not all fancy, people did stop to look at her ; that wild, white, beautiful face attracted much attention.

She looked neither to the right nor to the left ; her eyes were fixed and looked straight before her ; she walked rapidly without pausing until she reached the great railway station.

There she stood for a few minutes quite bewildered ; in the shrieks from the engines, in the cries of the porters, from every sound that reached her ears came that dread word, “murder.”

She was in time for the night mail to London ; she would reach London on the noon of the morrow ; for there she would take the train to Lynn. She was flying home with a distinct and settled purpose in her mind which never wavered from the moment in which she realized what she had done.

She had been many long hours now without food, and when the train stopped for a few minutes at Amiens, a lady seated in the same carriage with her looked up at her and begged her to take some wine.

“You look very ill and faint,” said the lady. “Let me persuade you to take some wine.”

The eyes raised to hers were full of unutterable woe ; the voice which answered hers was hardly human.

“I thank you,” said Lima, “but it would be useless—quite useless.”

So fixed was the terrible purpose in her mind, she might droop and tremble, but food and drink would

never pass her lips more—she who had that awful stain on her hands !

The winds blew fiercely, and the scream of the whistle rarely ceased. It seemed to her that others must hear it. It stormed the windows ; it beat angrily against the doors : it seemed to denounce her fiercely, with that one cry, “Murder !” Surely, every one must hear it, and must know that she had done it. There were times when fatigue was too great for her, and she slept—a troubled and terrible sleep, far more terrible than her waking moments, for in her sleep she was looking always at the body she had left lying on the ground, with the crimson wound on the white breast. She would wake up with a stifled cry of “Murder !” There was no rest, no refuge from the world. As fast as steam and wind could take her, hardly conscious, yet just able to control her actions, she went on to her doom.

Once more she was on the sea, the waves running high ; they seemed to hiss at her ; and as they rolled along, with one grand voice they thundered the word “murder.”

The waters rushed through the great wheels, and the wind swept over the deck ; all sound was alike on the vessel — and it formed the hateful word.

Once more she was on English ground, once more she was on road to Lynn. There were times when earth and sky seemed to meet, when her head fell on her breast, and for some minutes she was quite unconscious of all around her ; she awoke always with the word “murder” hissing in her ears.

She had left the railway station now, and it is almost noon of the following day. She does not take the road to the little cottage, which she will never see more, but to the banks of Allan Water.

She had one settled, dreadful purpose in her mind, from which she had never swerved. Useless for her to take food or wine, to look to the right or to the left, to linger over any of the haunts ; useless, for she was going to die. She did not dare to live ; even now they would be in hot pursuit of her. She could both hear and see

them in her mad fancy ; strong men with handcuffs in pursuit of her, each crying “murder! murder!”

Faster and faster she flew down the high-road, crossed the fields and there before her, shining and bright, lay the broad, beautiful sheet of Allan Water, calm and dimpling in the sunlight ; there, on the other side, was the old mill, with the quaint red roof and wealth of trees. She did not stop to look at it when the broad, shining waters broke on her sight. She clasped her hands and cried—“At last—at last!” but she did not pause or go more slowly.

They might be behind her now. They might cry “Murder” with myriad voices. She was safe. She would fling herself on the broad bosom of Allan Water—the only refuge left to her on earth.

Smiling and dimpling in the wintry sunshine, it was like an old friend. It was life rather than death, it was going home, she did not wait even to look round her ; her heart was on fire with impatience for rest.

She sprang into the water as one loved springs to the embrace of the beloved one. It closed round her as though it knew and loved her, and would keep her for evermore.

Once in the wintry sunlight a white arm and hand struck the water as though to beat it away ; then all was calm and still, the eddies died away, and there was no movement on the breast of Allan Water.

Later on that afternoon the miller, who had gone in search of the boat, cried out to his wife :

“Helen, what is that shining in the water there ? It looks like gold.” And he walked round the bank to see.

CHAPTER LVII.

MADAME LA COMTESSE had travelled as quickly as it was possible to go ; she had not lost or wasted one minute. Her one great fear was that some fatal mischief would be done before she reached Paris — the presentiment was strong upon her. She reached the railway station in the afternoon, and drove quickly home. She asked at once for her son ; she would not eat, drink, or rest until she had seen him.

“ Had an English lady been there ? ” she asked, and the answer was :

“ Yes ; an English lady had called on Monsieur le Comte.”

So far all was safe. She felt sure, from the placid faces around her, there had been no exposure, no scandal.

“ Where is Monsieur le Comte ? ” she asked of his valet, who replied, with a low bow, that he had gone to the Hôtel de Saison.

“ I will drive there at once,” said Madame la Comtesse ; and she entered the carriage. “ Drive quickly,” she said to the coachman, and for a time he obeyed ; but as they drew nearer he found it almost impossible to drive at all. The broad streets were lined with people, and Madame, to her horror, saw that before the door of Princess Helene’s house there was assembled a vast crowd.

“ What is it ? ” she cried, looking out of the carriage window.

Twenty heads were turned toward her, twenty voices answered at once, “ Murder ! murder ! ”

And a woman, whose face was livid with excitement, cried out to her :

“ There has been murder ! ”

“ Who is murdered ? ” asked madame, her lips growing stiff and white.

“ I do not know her name, but they say she is the most beautiful girl and the wealthiest heiress in France.”

"Who has murdered her?" asked madame.

I know not. Some one they say, who was *jealous of her.*"

"Great Heaven, the deed is done!" cried madame.

She hastened from her carriage. The crowd made way at sight of that proud woman, with her white, haggard face. She entered the house, and the first person she saw was her son.

"Leon," she cried, "what is it? What has happened?"

"Murder, mother!" he answered.

She bent her head and asked another question. He answered it with trembling, colorless lips.

Never had there been greater consternation, never more grief or dismay than when Susette, going with some message to her mistress, found her lying on the ground with that terrible crimson wound on her breast.

Her cries aroused the whole household, and there ensued a terrible confusion. Monsieur le Comte entered in the midst of it; his horror and dismay were terrible to behold.

His first question was, who had done it, and what was the motive? The servants could give him no information. It was true that a lady had been with her—a very fair and gentle lady; how long she had remained no one knew, nor had any one seen her go. His heart and conscience told him *who* it was and what she had done; his own heart told him also *who* had driven her to do it. Perhaps the most terrible moment of his life was the one in which he told the frightened servants that visit was no clew; that the crime had evidently been committed by a man, and that the motive was evidently robbery; that the reason why the robbery had not been completed must be that the murderer had been disturbed and had fled. Still, it seemed so incredible that such a crime could have been committed with a house full of servants. Madame Vesey was absent for the day. True, madame's boudoir was so far away from the servants' office that even a scream would not have been heard.

There was terrible excitement; the young count was at first quite overwhelmed with horror and dismay; it

was at that moment that madame returned, and a very different order of things was brought about ; the shrieking, terrified servants were sent each to their right place, the chief of the police was summoned ; above all, two or three of the most clever physicians in Paris were sent for, for Madame la Comtesse de Soldana, looking on the white face of Princess Helene, declared that she was not dead ; they came round her in wonder, but madame calmly repeated the words.

"I am quite sure that she is not dead," and the doctors who came said the same thing—"she was not dead."

Half an hour afterward Princess Helene had opened her eyes, and had spoken. Madame de Vesey had returned by that time, horrified to find her house in the hands of the doctors and the police ; there was a long consultation, and then the doctors gave it as their opinion that with the greatest care it was within the bounds of human possibility that she might recover. The wound was deep and painful, but not mortal they hoped. No need now for the services of the police, madame would be able to obtain all needful information from mademoiselle when she was able to give it. The day came when Princess Helene, looking very white and ill, was able to be questioned. Madame Vesey and Madame la Comtesse went to her and asked her for the clew to this cruel outrage, but she would give none. She had made up her mind to that during the first hours of her illness.

"I had driven the girl mad," she said to herself. "I had taken from her all that she valued most in the world. I might have been kinder, but, at least, I will not betray her ; no one living shall ever know the truth from me."

And she clung to that resolve with an almost savage fidelity, when the two ladies told her that the time had now come in which she must exert herself and tell them what had happened ; but to their intense surprise, Princess Helene had nothing to say.

"It was an accident," was all she had to say in answer to their inquiries—"a perfect accident."

"Nonsense, my dear," said Madame de Vesey, "an accident never drove that sharp dagger so near your heart."

"I fell on it," said Princess Helene, unblushingly; and then Madame de Vesey knew that all further questions were needless, for her niece would never tell one word of what had happened.

Madame la Comtesse quite understood. If Princess Helene had told the true story of that crime, there would have been great exposure, great scandal; the papers would have got hold of the story, and it would have spread all over France and England too. A thousand times better hush it up! Princess Helene, she thought, showed not only magnanimity, but good sense. They spoke but once on the matter, when Princess Helene herself had said :

"Madame la Comtesse, have you taken my affair quite out of the hands of the police?"

"I have not done so yet," replied Madame la Comtesse.

"Then, will you see to it at once, madame?" asked Princess Helene. "When they are made to understand that it is an accident they will see that they have nothing to do with it; they will understand. And, madame, with your permission, we will never mention the subject again."

And they never did.

The police perfectly understood. A paragraph went the round of the papers, saying that a great and most stupid mistake had been made, that there had been no murder, no assassination, not even an assault, nothing but an accident which happened while Mademoiselle de Saison was preparing for a masquerade ball, and from which she was rapidly recovering.

They did not tell Princess Helene at first what had happened in England. It was the principal of the college who wrote to the young count and told him what had happened. When he knew it and realized it, he suffered as few men can suffer; he was never the same man again; he lost his lightness of heart, his gay spirits, the music died from his smiles and his laughter. No one could have recognized in the stern, haughty man of the after-years the once cheery and graceful young count. He married Princess Helene, but they were never quite

happy, a dark shadow lay ever between them. Lima's name was never mentioned, no allusion was ever made to her, but her memory stood ever between husband and wife.

Monsieur Le Comte de Soldana became one of the leading statesmen in France; his name is a power in that land for which he sacrificed Lima, but he is not a happy man, no one ever sees him smile.

I think there are times when he would give up all he has in the world—rank, title, wealth, fortune, honors and fame—to be sitting once more in the little cottage garden with Lima's arms round his neck.

He is haunted, as men who have done wrong, who have been moral cowards, always are—haunted by the memory of a loving heart which he broke; of a fair, sweet face from which he had robbed the bloom and the beauty; of blue eyes, the light of which had been quenched with tears; of a fair young life sacrificed for him.

He is haunted; when he falls asleep it is Lima who says loving words to him, who stretches out her white arms to him, calls him her love and her husband, kisses his face with a tenderness beyond words. It is Lima who stands by his side every night and sings to him of the banks of Allan Water, always the last verses:

“ For the summer grief had brought her,
And the soldier false was he;
On the banks of Allan Water
None so sad as she.

“ On the banks of Allan Water,
When the winter snow fell fast,
Still was seen the miller's daughter,
Chilling blew the blast.

“ But the miller's lovely daughter
Both from cold and care was free;
On the banks of Allan Water,
There a corpse lay she.”

She sings it over and over again to him, and in his dreams he begs her for pity's sake not to look at him with those dead eyes, not to drag him, with those tender, outstretched arms down into the depths of Allan Water.

Then he wakes, and these memories sweep over him,

He is not a happy man, for the sweetest smile on his wife's face cannot drive these sad thoughts away.

The emperor sent him, for some service rendered, the grand cross of the Legion of Honor, and he thought that the proudest day of his life was when he received it; but that same evening, walking in the beautiful glades of Belle d'Or, he heard the wind sighing amongst the green leaves of the lime-trees, and he turned sick and faint to heart; there was no happiness in his pride.

* * * * *

When father and mother stood by the simple green grave in the churchyard at Lynn, there was but one question in life which had any interest left for them, and it was, What name should be engraved on the white marble cross?

"Not that French name," said the miller, "it is accursed; and not mine, for she shadowed it."

And the words standing there are simply these:

"THE BELLE OF LYNN."

THE END.



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